Atypical

by Extrinsical

Summary

"So...let's get married."
"So...let's get married."

It was said quite abruptly.

And Ruby didn't quite expect herself to phrase it that way, with a clumsy blurt, but she had.

Mid-way sipping through coffee, Weiss paused, and looked up to eye her over the rim of her cup coolly. A seemingly unfazed look adorned the almost delicate features belonging to her partner, were it not for the scar on her left eye giving her a sharper edge.

It was the sort of expression that made the younger woman think would only be possible given how often Ruby had sent the entire RWBY team to do insanely outrageous things over the years for the jobs allocated to them... as well as certain unmentionable little secret missions.

Generally, some of the orders she gave had been tough but workable, but some others were just plain crazy and brilliant and suicidal.

...And in retrospect, that probably was why Weiss had that expression on her face.

She felt a bead of sweat form at the back of her neck.

Still, of all the reactions she sort of expected from her partner (and best friend, even if Weiss wouldn't use that term to label them), the total silence had not been one of them. And a small part of her was screaming in her head - where is the ice? Where is the ice?!

The cup was slowly placed back on the saucer plate with a gentle clink.

She had to stop herself from fidgeting nervously.

The twenty-three year old president of the Schnee Dust Corporation scrutinized her with piercing eyes, attention now completely removed from the reports that she was reading a moment ago.

And for a short moment, Ruby allowed herself to admire her partner.

The past few years had allowed the former heiress turned president of Schnee Dust to flourish really well. Long white hair like the snow, cool eyes a shade of blue so pale that you could see the irises behind them, and a frame so slender and deceptively small - it was the sort of elegant beauty that felt so unreal and untouchable.

Occasionally, she couldn't help but think that Weiss was like something out of a fairytale.

Across the table, aristocratic white eyebrows were beginning to furrow darkly.

Belatedly, she begun to wonder if this was a good idea.

She had just proposed to her partner. As in, just partner. Well, okay, maybe not just partner given
that they had fought by each other's sides too many times to count now and more, plus Weiss was about as close to her as she could get without it falling over to the romantic side.

But, in Ruby's defense, the idea had sounded good in her head. It would solve several issues in one go, after all.

Annoyance, mingled with exasperation, was slowly building in those mist blue eyes.

"Ruby Rose…" the former heiress begun ominously.

Ruby back-pedaled to the wall behind her, hands raised frantically. "W-wait! Listen to what I've to say first!"

Weiss clenched her teeth and stood. "You have two minutes," she growled, and planted her hands imposingly on the table as she glared across the table.

The other cleared her throat. "W-well, you were complaining about your board saying it's time to get married, right? Plus, you hated having to meet suitors."

The white-haired woman gave her an incredulous look. "And that justifies us getting married? Ruby - "

"And!" She continued hastily. "It's not like we are getting married for real. It will help you get your board off your back, and my dad off me."

Weiss's eyebrows furrowed further. "Tai? What are you talking about?"

Briefly, Ruby relished the fact that Weiss was finally comfortable enough to call her dad by the name. That had been a long, hard battle for the Xiao-Long and Rose family, and one they had full bragging rights for when they won, especially given how courtesy had been ingrained into Weiss all her life.

Her mood did go sour at the reminder of Tai however.

"Dad's been on my case for being single," she grumbled. "He's worried I'll end up being a spinster. He kept saying I'm always going out for dangerous missions and a lover would keep me grounded. And to make it worse, Yang is egging him on." While cackling, Ruby remembered. She would have her revenge on her sister one of these days.

At that, Weiss snorted. "I would say that his concern has merit."

Ruby puffed out her cheeks. "I just don't have anyone I like that way."

The former heiress rolled her eyes, anger seemingly dissipating, but her eyes were still piercing when they looked back at Ruby.

"That," the older woman said waringly, "does not explain the proposal, Ruby."

Said person who proposed winced.

"W-well, a marriage would get them off your back, right? Give you some room to breathe? You were complaining about it just an hour ago! I could use some peace, and you most certainly do," she stressed.

Weiss was still looking at her with narrowed eyes.
"And," she continued hastily, "Weiss, it's me. Your partner! You know I wouldn't be trying to manipulate you like those stupid suitors of yours. And it's not like we have to do any of those icky stuff - " a white eyebrow twitched - "it would be just a blank marriage. Plus, we have been roommates for four years at Beacon and we know each other's habits so it won't be awkward and it will make your board shut up and let you concentrate on the thing you are working on with Blake, and give me a bit of peace too and - "

"Ruby, stop."

Her mouth snapped shut.

Two dainty fingers pinched the bridge of Weiss's nose, massaging it as if trying to stem off a pounding headache.

"Ruby," a long suffering sigh, "The board has become frustrating as of late, I agree, but marriage, Ruby? Exactly why do you think I'll agree to such a ridiculous solution?"

"Because…” the younger woman hesitated, "you didn't say no yet?"

Silence.

And it was true. The former heiress was a person who passed judgement quickly, and often made snap decisions like a second nature. She certainly wouldn't hesitate to shred a ludicrous idea to nothing if it was brought forward to her, and Ruby was currently topping the chart for that.

Recent years may have mellowed her harsh nature (at least to those close to her), but that side of hers was still inherently Weiss Schnee.

So when Weiss had not outright rejected the idea, Ruby knew that her partner saw some merit in it. It might also be that her board had been frustrating her to the point she was ready to consider just about the most outrageous ideas as long as they could shut the board up.

The white-haired woman just looked at her silently for a few moments, before finally crossing her arms, and sighing in exasperation.

"I don't think you really understand what you are suggesting, Ruby," Weiss said dryly.

"But I do!" was the protest.

"No, you don't. Do you even know why they want me to marry?"

Ruby's mouth closed shut, and her eyebrows furrowed.

Come to think of it, while her partner had been muttering vile things about her board whenever the topic came up, Weiss hadn't actually specified why it started coming up.

Especially since the woman was only twenty three years old. Who marries at twenty three nowadays?

"Uh...why?" That was really all Ruby could think of saying.

Weiss clicked her tongue irritably. And for a moment, the president seemed to battled with herself before she gave a resigned look.

"They want me to produce an heir."
Her brain blanked out.

"...What?"

Weiss threw her a sharp look, as if asking how dense she was going to be.

"You heard me the first time. They. Want. An. Heir."

"B-but - " she gaped.

"Please do not tell me you need a lesson about birds and the bees, Ruby."

She flushed a deep red.

"I don't!" she exclaimed loudly, almost ready to stomp her foot at the insult. "I'm twenty one, okay! I know how that works."

There was a peculiar glint in Weiss's mist blue eyes as the older woman looked at her. "Do you now?"

"Yes! Yes! I-I know how that works!" Ruby sputtered in disbelief. Were they really going to talk about this? No. No. She was so not going to talk about this. Desperate for an escape, she pointed an accusing finger at Weiss. "A-a-and that's beside the point! Weiss, you are only twenty three!"

Said accused rolled her eyes and huffed. "Yes. I am also a huntress and the head of SDC. I do, also, have a big target painted across my back by extremists consisting of faunus and human both. Or did you forget that?" Her words were full of sarcasm.

Abruptly, the mood in the room changed.

Something cold stirred in Ruby's stomach.

"What are you talking about?"

Weiss looked like she was sorely regretting even bringing the entire topic up, but eventually she spoke, if a bit curtly.

"What do you think I'm talking about? You know as well as I do that I had and will always have a bounty on my head."

Ruby's eyes narrowed. Her mind raced back to when this...this entire marriage thing has started.

Considering that Weiss had been a target her entire life, that particular snippet of information shouldn't have been of any significance. But the part of them wanting her to produce an heir?

That was new, considering that they could've started harping about it the moment Weiss graduated from Beacon and yet did not.

Until now. What was so special about twenty three?

"Weiss..." she said slowly.

The other scowled. "What?"

"Why does your board want you to produce an heir now?"
The former heiress grimaced, and that was all Ruby needed to see to know that something did happen.

It was Ruby's turn to cross her arms and stare down at her partner. Half a decade ago the huntress wouldn't even think of doing this, but the years at Beacon and the following two years after that had proved that she could be a leader who radiated authority.

Also, she had the advantage of height now, thanks to a growth spurt during the second year of Beacon.

"Weiss." Said leader of team RWBY demanded.

Her partner simply regarded her silently for a moment, guarded and evaluating, reminiscent of a time when they had conversed about Weiss's family on a cliff overlooking the sea.

Then, the president of SDC sighed.

"The White Fang has gotten aggressive." The cup was picked up, and Weiss sipped at her beverage - only to have her expression twist with disgust as she put it back down.

Coffee gone cold, probably.

Ruby would've offered to make her another cup, but she refused to allow herself to get sidetracked now with the current topic.

"White Fang?" She was immediately by Weiss's side, assessing for any injuries as she ran gentle, testing hands down her partner's arms, searching for bandages, scratches, bruises, anything - she hadn't noticed any earlier, but then again the other wore long sleeves and combat skirts no longer dominated the wardrobe. "When? What did they do? Did they hurt you? How - "

"Calm down!" Weiss snapped and planted her hand on Ruby's shoulder, putting her leader at arm's length.

Ruby just stared, nervous energy and light-hearted mood from a short while ago seemingly gone. If there was even so much of a scratch on her partner, she would hunt down those responsible for it.

The white-haired woman lifted her hand away carefully and took a step back. With a deep breath and a tense voice, she spoke. "I'm fine. I'm not injured. So calm down, okay?"

...But the younger huntress still remembered the beeping machineries.

The white ceiling, the faded beige tiles, the air that was filled with a faint scent of blood, and the bed at the center of the private room that seemed to dwarf a small, still figure with stray bandages on her head, arms and the white hair spread out -

Her teeth almost grinded together.

"Ruby," her partner said quietly. "I'm fine."

There were a myriad of things hidden beneath the suddenly soft voice, one that made her heart felt as if it was being squeezed tight.

She breathed in deeply, and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, it was to meet Weiss's mist blue eyes that were calmly regarding her with a hint of hesitance.
Slowly, she uncurled her fists that she suddenly realized had been clenched tight enough to hurt, and spoke.

"Weiss."

Said woman tilted her head slightly in acknowledgement of the name.

The younger huntress took in another deep, calming breath.

"Tell me what happened."

...  

A/N - ...This had just totally exploded in a direction I didn't expect it to go. I was planning to do something short. Woo.

Story will be related to Cobblestone, in the sense that I may reference events in that fic here now and then. Consider it a prelude, even though it's not necessary for you to read it.

Feedback and all are, as always, much appreciated. Thank you.
In retrospect, Weiss didn't even really have to explain what happened.

It was more robberies, more terrorism, all around brutal savagery and just...more everything, really, with the most recent being the bomb that exploded at the mines Weiss was visiting four months ago.

Ruby really, really wanted to ask why she was only finding out about it now, but the answer was just as immediate - it was because she had been flitting from town to town in remote areas, and she had only been back at Atlas for the past month.

The bombing news didn't entirely die down yet - it couldn't given that hundreds of lives were involved - but with each passing day and Weiss's efficient handling of the matter…

And of course neither Weiss nor Blake seemed to think it was worth mentioning to her, much to her disgruntlement.

Still, the former heiress had been lucky - she had just only arrived at the mines when it went off. Someone at White Fang had erred badly at setting the timer on the bomb.

It also indicated just how far they were willing to go now.

To set a bomb in the mines, where faunus worked, to get at her partner… it was as if they have completely lost track of their original objectives - and a part of Ruby was remembering Roman Torchwick, the blasted man, and the woman in red who wielded fire dust like a second nature.

She wondered if they had played a part in it.

Her gaze moved to meet mist blue eyes belonging to Weiss, the woman who had leaned back against the sofa next to her.

"So this heir," she paused, struggled for tact, and failed miserably. "Your board is pressing you because of...that."

Because the White Fang was willing to kill hundreds just to get to her.

The white-haired woman pursed her lips.

"Yes."

Even as Weiss confirmed it, Ruby saw something like helpless rage and grief flash past those mist blue eyes, heart-wrenching and endless -

And then it was gone, so quickly that she thought she may have imagined it.

"The White Fang," Weiss said to her, "has proven that they will do whatever it takes, so we will have to act accordingly."
Something in her clenched tightly at the calm, impassive way her partner spoke.

"Still, Blake's already on it. So honestly, Ruby, you don't need to be concerned - "

Her hand flashed up to press against Weiss's lips, cutting off the rest of the sentence.

"Nope," she countered. "Not going to happen." There was a finality in her tone that she knew Weiss would understand - it meant Ruby wasn't budging and nothing her partner said would sway her.

The president scowled, exasperated, and batted that hand away. "You are being a dunce, Ruby."

Said dunce was not deterred, returning to the previous topic at hand. The leader of team RWBY also made a mental note to talk to Blake later about this. Weiss was being tight-lipped, but then she always had been when it came to her own well-being.

"The heir," Ruby fired the opening volley.

The former heiress scowled harder and glared. "What about it?"

Unaffected by the icy look, she continued. "What are you going to do?"

"What do you mean, what?" Weiss shot back. "There's only one thing I can do."

A frown settled on Ruby's features. "Produce an heir?" With who?

Silence.

Then, a sigh of frustration.

"Yes," Weiss said finally. "That's what I'll do. What the board says, Ruby? It's all logical, and I do agree with them."

What?

"But you don't even like those suitors!" she burst out.

"No," the president just looked back at her, gaze calm but intense. "I don't. But I will have to regardless. This is my duty. Why do you think I keep meeting them?"

Realization was slowly dawning on Ruby. Weiss, being who she was, could have likely brushed off the idea of marrying and producing an heir easily.

But she did not. Instead...Instead…

The cold feeling in Ruby's stomach coiled more tightly.

"I cannot ignore the possibility that I may die, Ruby." There was a strange note in Weiss's suddenly soft and far away words, and the younger huntress did not like it at all. "And someone must take up the mantle if I perish."

Silence.

The memory flashed in her mind again - of a hospital room, blood, soaked bandages, beeping machine, a still person -
A slow, shuddering breath.

"I won't let it happen," she said, maybe whispered, maybe begged, but her voice cracked all the same. "You know I won't, Weiss."

Cool fingers brushed against her cheek gently in a rare show of affection, and a ghost of a smile quirked up.

"I know," Weiss said faintly, mist blue eyes for once open and soft and sad. "But some things are beyond even your control and mine. You know that, Ruby."

Ruby was suddenly latching onto the older woman, curling tight and burrowing her head into the crook of Weiss's neck.

Her partner tensed, then relaxed marginally, one hand lifting to pat on her back gently.

"Dunce," Weiss said to her without heat. "It's not like I'm planning to produce an heir right this instant, you realize?" was the off-hand words. "In two, maybe three years, yes. But not right now. Even my board is not that ridiculous."

She squeezed tighter.

"But the marriage has to happen now?"

Weiss huffed into red-tipped dark locks of hair. "Just imagine the scandal if I get an heir out of a wedlock," she muttered, before she visibly sighed. "Yes, Ruby, it has to happen. Soon, if not now. My board is nervous, and I need to at least reassure them that the Schnee line does not end with me."

"...How soon as soon?"

There was a moment where her partner seemed to consider her answer, but Weiss eventually spoke.

"As soon as I'm sure whoever I end up together with is acceptable."

Acceptable. In Weiss's dictionary, that meant justifiable for the Schnee Dust Corporation. Or suitable, in at least status, wealth and/or reputation.

Someone who would befit Weiss Schnee's standing.

"And your feelings?" Ruby asked quietly into her collarbone.

The hand that was patting her stilled on her back, a faint and warm imprint over her clothes.

"They have no part in this."

Her grip tightened.

She knew it. She knew it.

Being the president of Schnee Dust Corporation was slowly changing her partner in ways she didn't like seeing, and ever since that time -

How was it that Weiss could go so far without considering herself at all? How could she make such ruthlessly cold decisions about her life and just accept it like that, for the sake of her goals, the company, the faunus, the - the - everything.
She was doing it for *everything* that she was holding more important than herself, and Ruby *hated* it.

The younger huntress felt her jaw clench.

No.

She wasn't going to let her partner throw her life away like this.

Weiss was letting loose a breath at her hold that tightened so much that it was bone-crushing. "Ruby, not too - "

"Marry me."

The white-haired woman tensed in her embrace.

Ruby untangled herself slowly, catching mist blue eyes with her own.

"You could marry me," Ruby insisted in earnest now. She had only been half-serious earlier, but now? Now she was really serious.

Something like anger, true and bright, begun to simmer in mist blue eyes.

"Do you not understand the implications of what you are suggesting even after what I said?" Weiss asked tersely.

Her mind raced.

"I - I do, but - "

"There is no but," the president cut in curtly. "You would be expected to carry my heir or impregnate me."

She flushed.

With today's dust and technology, Ruby was well aware of what was needed for that to happen, especially when it came to female couples. But at the same time, she didn't like the idea of Weiss doing...things... with those stupid suitors of hers.

Especially since Weiss did not like them. At all.

"...Better with me than with someone you don't even like?" Ruby asked after a moment, cheeks and neck uncomfortably warm. She tried not to think about the intimate acts they would have to perform and failed miserably.

Weiss's mouth opened and then closed, pressing into a thin line.

"I - " the former heiress stopped, shook her head, and did not answer that particular question. "No. No, Ruby. This is a stupid idea, why are you even suggesting it? Why are we even *talking* about this?"

The first tendrils of hurt licked at her. "Am I that unacceptable?"

Weiss looked back at her, and her gaze was sharp. "Don't be stupid, of course you are acceptable." It was a harsh reprimand that made Ruby flinch. "I'm saying you have your own life. And you want to throw all of it away for this? Do you even understand how being with me will affect *you*?"
Something like realization settled in her mind. The hurt faded, and the more logical part of her was beginning to see what her partner was thinking.

She would be in the spotlight. She would have to step into a world that Weiss had zealously barred Ruby - and Yang, to some extent - from entering. White Fang would also be targeting her actively, with the teammate status elevated to spouse.

Spouse...

Her life wouldn't entirely be her own, anymore. It would be part Weiss's - not that it already wasn't - but just in a very different way.

But Ruby also had her own argument to counter with, if Weiss was going with that point.

Her hands curled into fists. "And you think I'll let you marry someone you don't even like and be miserable?"

"That," Weiss bit out, "is my choice."

"Then this is my choice too!"

The former heiress shook her head, standing up, for all intents and purposes ready to end this conversation. "Not mine, Ruby. Not mine. It takes two people to create a disaster like this, and I am not being a part of it."

Ruby grabbed onto her wrist before she could leave.

"Release me this instant," was the curt order.

"No." Ruby's response was equally stubborn. Her mind scrambled for a possible solution. "Look, let's - let's give it two years."

The white-haired woman paused. "What are you talking about?"

"You said an heir in two or three years, right?" she rushed out, the idea forming in her head even as she rapidly spoke. "So that means we could give ourselves two years to see what could happen between us, and if we end up, um, together," - a white eyebrow twitched again - "that's good, right? And in the event we don't, or if you found someone you could be with, we could even do an amicable annulment without hurting each other!"

Weiss just stared at her like she was insane.

Her grip on that pale, slender hand tightened.

"A-and like I said, I need my dad off my back anyway, so it's still a win-win situation!"

The expression on the former heiress's face was rapidly darkening. "And what happens if we don't end up 'together' or, as you put it, did not 'find someone I could be with'?"

Ruby hesitated. "We could - we could keep trying."

Weiss released a slow, exasperated breath. "Hypothetically - and I do mean hypothetically, for the sake of this argument - if we do marry, continuing to try after two years is not a solution. The heir must happen, Ruby, one way or another." Blue eyes pierced into her. "It's not a matter of choice."

In other words, her partner was saying that the annulment would happen either way if things did
not work out.

And then Weiss would marry a suitor to get it done.

But Ruby knew she would never forgive herself if she even so much as let Weiss do this when she had a chance to stop it right now.

"...Then we will do it if it comes to that."

Silence.

An unreadable mask settled itself on Weiss's face.

"You are saying you'll impregnate me or bear my heir, Ruby Rose?"

She swallowed, throat suddenly dry.

Briefly - very briefly - Ruby tried to imagine herself touching Weiss that way, holding her close in a way that no one else ever would ever get the chance to, and taking something from her that could never be returned.

Given, there was already a part of Ruby that belonged to the former heiress - they were partners long before they were friends, and now they were as close as they could get before tacking the label of a family or couple onto themselves.

And nurtured with time and a deep, encompassing bond - not even Weiss would deny that a part of her was Ruby's.

But to belong to each other in that way?

The thought of it made her heart pound, not entirely in an uncomfortable way, and... and if Ruby were honest with herself?

She didn't actually hate the idea.

It all but made her hold on more tightly, thumb pressing on the inside of the wrist in an almost intimate caress that she had never done before, and feeling the gentle, steady heartbeat against her finger.

A flicker in mist blue eyes - Weiss hadn't missed that.

Abruptly, something in the air between them changed.

There was a different kind of tension in the air now, different from when they were arguing heatedly just a moment ago.

It made Ruby all that more aware of the person in front of her, of long white hair, a deceptively delicate appearance that belied all the deadly skills ingrained into her, the thin scar that stood out in stark contrast against the pale skin and electrifying blue eyes -

"Yes," she said, feeling oddly like a stranger hearing herself speak. "Yes, I will."

Silence.

"...You said I was acceptable," the younger huntress felt the need to point out when Weiss didn't seem inclined to say anything yet.
Mist blue eyes narrowed at her.

A moment of insecurity, reminiscent of her younger days, washed over Ruby.

Then the white haired woman shook her head again with a weary sigh, eyes closing momentarily.

"So I did," Weiss agreed, the unreadable mask falling away, and a myriad of emotions, too many to discern, seemed to war within her gaze.

Their eyes met; stormy silver and intense blue.

And there was something like finality in Weiss's quiet voice when she spoke.

"The answer is still no."

Ruby wasn't ready to give in. She had known it was going to be a very, very uphill battle to get her partner to agree the moment she voiced this, and had braced herself for the opposition.

And this wasn't an argument that the younger huntress would allow herself to lose, either.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Is the answer not obvious?" Weiss looked fairly frustrated by this point, attempting to tug her hand away from the vice grip Ruby had. "Do I really have to spell it out for you?"

She maintained her hold. Short of Weiss actually harming her (which she knew would never happen), the slender and less physically strong woman would never be able to remove her appendage.

Truth to tell, Ruby did understand why her partner was refusing.

But… not this time.

Not this time.

The stakes were so much higher now - they were nothing like the playful dares that they had set for each other during their time at Beacon. This time there were lives at stake, happiness at stake, and Weiss who had willingly put herself forward as a bargaining chip on a gigantic chess board where the wrong move could mean crippling her in so many ways.

Or worse, she could die.

And Ruby would sooner destroy Crescent Rose than let Weiss face this by herself, the idiotic martyr that she was.

Her partner was still trying to disentangle her arm, and Ruby, in return, tugged back sharply.

There was a surprised yelp, the sound of something crashing back onto the sofa, a grunt, and red cloak that flew in the air for the briefest of a moment -

Suddenly, it was deathly silent, save for the faint ticking of the antique, grandfather clock by the corner of the room.

Ruby was hovering over her partner, noses were almost touching, and stray locks of black hair tickled Weiss's pale but flushed cheeks. This close, all she could see was startled mist blue eyes and the dark irises within them - and she could feel the tension lining her partner's slender frame.
And for one small, wild and terrifying moment, Ruby wanted to slant her lips over Weiss's to see what it felt like.

Then -

Someone knocked on the door.

"Weiss? Ruby?"

Blake, just outside.

But Ruby didn't move.

She had absolutely no intention of letting Weiss up; from the flicker of assessment in those blue eyes, her partner must have already come to the same conclusion.

"...Are you going to get off me?" the former heiress asked then, as if this was an everyday thing, uncharacteristically calm. "She's going to come in if she doesn't hear a response, you know."

Silver eyes narrowed.

"Are you going to say yes?" There was a very implied something in Ruby's daring words. If Blake came in and see them like this, and if the faunus had someone else with her...

Well.

That just meant marriage wouldn't make much of a difference in how Ruby would be affected anymore. Rumors would spread like wildfire regardless, and she'd be in the spotlight all the same. It would also mean that, where public opinion was concerned, Weiss Schnee was all but already attached except in name.

Mist blue eyes darkened rapidly.

Weiss had always been quick on the uptake, perceptive woman that she was.

Ruby honestly did not enjoy manipulating her partner this way. Often, she had stamped down the more ruthless, calculating side of her - but she wasn't the leader of team RWBY for nothing.

Being able to manipulate her team came with the territory of being a good leader.

"Are you forcing me?"

She blinked, actually lifted her head a bit to better able look her in the eye, and blinked again.

"What?"

"If I don't say yes, are you going to force this on me?" Weiss clarified, gaze piercing but unreadable.

Silence.

This was it, Ruby knew. If she said yes... her partner would no longer view her the way she did in the past. Weiss would go along with it, most certainly.

But that would come with a price, and one that would be far too costly for Ruby.
And if she said no… her jaw clenched.

There was no right answer to this. All she could fall back on now was her feelings, and how important Weiss was to her. And if even that couldn't sway her partner, then Ruby was just going to have to stick around the white-haired woman like a leech and scare the lights out of every suitor.

Because she would be damned if something happened to her precious partner.

Like that time where everything went wrong -

The younger huntress clamped the memory down immediately.

She breathed in deeply, strangely shaky.

Ruby lifted a hand then, from where she was firmly caging her partner in, brought it to rest against the side of the older woman's neck, and angled their foreheads together.

"I'm asking you to let me help you," her words were faint against Weiss.

There was the phantom sting of failure ghosting in her chest, reminding her of the time when she had nearly went wild with rage, and only the warmth emanating from the person below her was allowing it to ebb away slowly.

"If something happened to you and I wasn't there to prevent it again," Ruby told her quietly, "I would never forgive myself. You know that, Weiss. So please. Let me help you."

There. She said it.

Blue eyes, burning with fierce anger and some kind of unidentifiable emotion, pierced into her. And something like an ethereal fist was grasping Ruby's heart tightly, leaving her feeling strangely vulnerable in the older woman's presence despite that she had all the leverage right now.

And Weiss, for a moment, looked like she wanted to say something - maybe even lash out - but the knocking on the door stopped her before she could even start.

A heartbeat of silence, before her partner finally sighed, gently pushing her up, increasing the distance between them marginally.

"Release me now." It was a curt voice that betrayed nothing that the white-haired huntress was thinking.

She did.

Weiss stood, brushing off imaginary lint and adjusting her clothes, before looking back at the younger huntress with a hard, angry gaze. Ruby just stared back, shoulders slumped, waiting for her decision.

Another knock on the door, louder this time.

And then something in Weiss's demeanor changed, maybe even softened - she suddenly didn't seem quite that cold anymore, nor as furious.

Instead, she looked… almost sad.
Sad.

Then, at long last, Weiss spoke the words that would change both their lives.

"I accept your proposal."

Four simple words.

But it meant everything.

Weiss didn't bother to wait for a response, and instead turned to make quick, steady steps towards the door.

And when Blake finally entered (alone), it was to catch sight of Ruby's blank expression. It made amber eyes glance back curiously at Weiss - the latter who simply huffed and crossed her arms in return.

... 

A/N - ...I normally don't do a 3.6k word scene. Especially one that was continuing from the previous. But for whatever reason, when it involves Weiss and Ruby, long scenes tend to happen (i.e. Cobblestone).

I should add that this will, in all likelihood, turn into a flash fic. Haven't quite decided yet, but given the materials being written currently… it does seem like it's going into that direction. I hope you guys like flash fics?

I may also be looking for a guinea pig or two to read all these stuff before I actually post them, just so that I'm reassured about not overdoing something or going underboard with some parts, so hit me up if you are interested. Bonus points if you enjoy dissecting characters.

Feedback, as always, are much appreciated. Thank you for reading.
Weiss stared at the papers and magazines spread out in front of her, mystified at their very existence.

How, she wondered, did it come to this?

It had been only two days.

Or to be exact, two weeks since she had accepted Ruby's proposal, one week since she conferred with her head of security about things that may crop up, and two days since Weiss (with great reluctance) finally allowed for the news be made public.

...And two days since everything seemingly went berserk.

Blake, her teammate turned head of security, was currently placing a magazine on the last empty spot by the left side of the table.

This particular magazine had a bolded title saying "LONG TIME LOVERS FINALLY GOING PUBLIC" on its cover, a somewhat younger looking Ruby and Weiss prominently displayed, figures back to back with Myrtenaster and Crescent Rose gripped in their usual stances...

How did they even snap pictures of those specific poses? Did paparazzi actually stalk her when they were hunting Grimm or training? And the picture had to be from their time at Beacon because combat dresses were no longer part of her daily attire - they had long since been replaced with clothes more practical for a professional environment.

...And were those actually little pink hearts peppered all over their picture?

"There's a couple more that I'm expecting, " Blake was saying, and Weiss had to force herself to focus on the voice, "from smaller magazine companies, but these are the major publishers."

Her entire table was, quite literally, covered with magazines and papers with similar headlines.

One read, 'Secret lovers to marry!'

A second read, 'Now proven: Schnee and Rose confirmed in LOOOVE.'

And a third read, 'The love life of Weiss Schnee and Ruby Rose over the years. Scoop it here!'

It was utterly mystifying.

Weiss looked up to meet the faunus's gaze blankly.

Amber eyes, gleaming with undisguised amusement, merely quirked a questioning brow.

She twitched.

Then she sighed.
"I…" she trailed off. Weiss didn't really know what to say, faced with these abominable items on her table. She wondered where Yang was. Her semblance would be immensely useful right about now.

Or perhaps she should unsheathe her rapier and use the fire dust loaded in it instead. That would be a lot more efficient, especially since the blonde was all wild, uncontrollable fire and Weiss currently had no interest in dousing flames.

The president shook her head wearily then, unable to summon even dredges of the temper she was renowned for. "Blake. What are… all these?"

The other dark brow lifted. "You don't know?"

The former heiress huffed. "Enlighten me."

"Well," Blake said after a pause, "you are the president of a multi billion lien company, so you're bound to hit the headlines regardless. And with how many suitors you've turned down, people were beginning to wonder if you were actually waiting for someone."

It was a very, very pointed remark.

"...Or so the gossip magazines say," her teammate's bland voice continued. "Some of them, in fact, are boasting that their theories about a pair of secret lovers waiting to go public have at long last been proven."

Blake tapped at the last magazine she had placed on the far left, and Weiss twitched again.

"Please tell me why I wasn't aware of… these. Until today."

The faunus shrugged. "You don't read gossip magazines," was the simple explanation.

Weiss scowled. "You do?"

Blake's lips upturned into a faint smile that promised mischief. "Comes with the job description."

The scowl grew, before the white-haired woman sighed in exasperation again.

"As it turns out, this particular theory was true, wasn't it?" Blake's amused voice floated in the air.

There was a very large part of the former heiress that wanted to deny that statement. However, given that both Ruby and Weiss had agreed that this was to stay between them, at least for now, the white-haired woman didn't really have a choice but to bear the teasing as stoically as she could.

It was already a feat that she had not yet exploded.

A part of her did think she really shouldn't be keeping this from the faunus, who was, after all, her head of security. But Ruby didn't want Tai to know (and by extension Yang), and that meant it would be unfair to the blonde if Blake were to know.

In all honesty, Weiss didn't even want to begin explaining it either. She wouldn't know where to start, for one. She couldn't even begin to fathom how Ruby had managed to make her agree to this.

And three, the entire… thing… had sent her reeling in a confused jumble of emotions, and it was something that she was still trying to sort out internally.
Something fundamental between her and Ruby had changed that day, and Weiss didn't know what to make of it.

Still, it was odd that the supposedly very-much-in-love-couple did not have to really say anything to prove that they had something going on. Most had accepted their suddenly declared relationship as it was… and Yang had been particularly vocal when she said "Finally!"

...Did everyone really think she and Ruby had something going on?

She resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of her nose. She was going to have a headache again. She just knew it.

With an aggrieved sigh, she gestured at the magazines on her table - tactfully choosing to ignore the blatant teasing and focus on the more important matter at hand. "So the public reaction is veering towards positive?"

A nod. "Not many have actually voiced disapproval... well, except for some of the traditionally inclined."

The blue bloods, in other words.

Weiss mulled over the information. Those she could deal with. It was unlikely that they would openly cause issues, regardless... To offend her, and by extension the Schnee Dust Corporation, would take a very brave or a very stupid person.

But mostly stupid.

Still, it paid to be careful. There were snakes at every turn.

"You are compiling the list of potential threats?"

"I am."

If nothing else, she thought, the one good thing that came out of this was less attention on Blake. There were a small but growing number of instances when Weiss didn't know how safe it was for her faunus teammate to work with her, but the public had found something new to munch at now.

And the bad thing?

Ruby was about to enter a world that she should never have needed to step into, and Weiss didn't like it one bit.

It was too late to stop it now that it had gone public, however, not that Ruby wanted to back out. And cancelling it would just cause issues Weiss wasn't interested in dealing with, nor did she want her partner to have to deal with the backlash.

Such was the price of someone with her status, she thought with no small amount of dry humor.


"Hm."


She glanced at the monitor that blinked intermittently - Blake was already reaching over to tap at it.
"Yes?" the faunus asked.

"Ma'am, Miss Rose has arrived."

Amused gold eyes flickered back to Weiss for a second, before her teammate spoke into the intercom again. "Send her in."

Weiss shot her head of security a dark glare.

And annoyingly enough, where most people would have been cowed by her withering look, Blake didn't seem affected by that at all.

The door opened to reveal a young woman with black hair and red streaks in it, cloak swaying gently behind her, and grey eyes bright and curious with life.

Still so full of energy, Weiss thought wryly, even if Ruby did not visibly bounce with it anymore.

And how she had grown. The messy black hair - longer now than when she had been fifteen (but still somewhat short) - seemed to accentuate her silver eyes, reaching past her ears if not tucked behind them.

Sometimes, Weiss found it difficult to relate this young woman with the naive girl she once knew. Equally exasperating was that Ruby was now just a bit taller, though unlike Yang, she had a figure that was lithe and slender and so completely made for the speed she was renowned for.

In the light, ruby-red rose earrings glimmered.

They matched her well, she thought idly, and not just because of the surname.

"Um, hey." Ruby's head tilted a little as she took in both her teammates and the various magazines scattered on the table. "...Am I interrupting?"

Weiss rolled her eyes.

"No," she beckoned, a ghost of a smile forming despite herself, "come in."

It was Ruby's turn to get teased by Blake anyway. Weiss had borne the brunt of it for the entire morning.

...

After that, time passed quickly.

And it probably was quite an understatement to say that Ruby didn't quite feel like herself right now.

Coco was currently observing her with the critical eye of an approving detective, sunglasses set low on her nose. She was leaning against the wall with a thoughtful thumb on her chin, and it only made Ruby all the more uncomfortable to see those bright chocolate eyes fixed so intently at her.

"Beautiful," the shopkeeper next to the older woman was clapping her hands in delighted approval. "Hiding those wonderful curves under that cloak, I see!"

She felt her cheeks grow warm.

Velvet had to agree. "You look good." A sincere smile. "I'm sure Weiss will like it."
The scowl that settled on Ruby's face was a pale imitation of the withering glare that her white-haired partner owned. That generally meant it had no effect on Coco, much less Velvet... the faunus who had long since been desensitized to Weiss's icy looks.

It probably didn't help that her cheeks just went red hot either.

"Velvet," her cheeks puffed out, hands crossed defensively against the silky material that Coco hand-picked for her. She was feeling quite underdressed at the moment, without her usual combat skirt and the cloak. "Are we done?"

A glance at Coco, who just smirked back.

"Babe, that was the last one. And Weiss owes us big time for this favor, just so you know, solving the issue of your horrifyingly empty wardrobe - and don't look at me like that, your fiancee agreed. And yes, Ruby, you can change back now. We - "

The door to the dressing room slammed closed.

"...can go get some food after this."

Coco snorted; Velvet giggled.

"Little Rose," the brown-haired woman called from outside, "you do realize that you are marrying Weiss Schnee, the president of a multi billion lien company?"

An incoherent, muffled grumble.

Of course she knew that; Ruby was the one who kept pushing her partner to agree to it.

But Weiss, the talented politician that she was, negotiated a few points and forced her to promise those before finally allowing them to proceed with this.

Ridiculous points, mind.

1. The moment Ruby wanted out, she would with all due haste inform Weiss as such, and Weiss would dismantle the entire thing. (This was apparently the most important requirement even if Ruby disagreed.)

2. If anyone attempted to, as far as Ruby could reasonably detect:
   a) Convince her to do their bidding (i.e. manipulation or anything involving malicious intent),
   b) Threaten her physically or otherwise,
   c) Seduce her for any reason at all,
   Ruby would inform Weiss and/or Blake immediately and not attempt to handle the matter by herself.

3. Ruby would not, under any circumstances, heed Yang's and/or Nora's advice on what would be suitable additions for their wedding, should she want any. She may however consult Blake, Coco, Velvet and Pyrrha as she wished. Or any of their friends. Just...not those two. And not Jaune either.

4. If Ruby so much as attempted to add anything to the wedding just because it was "cool" or "awesome", Weiss reserved the right to strangle her.

Her partner had even said all of this with clearly pronounced boring legal annotations and verb..verbiose...verbose? Verbage?
Weiss, she thought moodily, was such a killjoy.

It was a wonder that the white-haired woman didn't actually pull out a document requiring her signature… but then it could also be because her head would've spun at the amount of words to read and she'd just skim to the bottom and sign it anyway.

Actually, she mused, that might be exactly why Weiss had decided to drill it into her verbally as opposed to using a document…

"Ruby?" Velvet knocked on the door gently. "Everything okay in there?"

She jumped, startled from her thoughts.

"Y - yeah! I'm coming!

Hastily, she moved to change out of the dress and back into her usual attire - one that made her feel infinitely more comfortable.

As Ruby deposited the large pile of clothing on the counter, Velvet handed over a slick, black and shiny card to the cashier - one that was apparently a cause of annoyance for Coco as she glared at it.

"I still don't see why she wouldn't trust me with her card." Arms crossed.

"Or me," Ruby felt the need to add. "I'm her partner."

Velvet looked amused. "You like shopping too much. And Ruby, I don't think Weiss intended for you to buy a cookie store today."

Coco looked affronted; Ruby sulked.

"Fashion, I'll have you know, is an ever-changing industry," claimed the brown-haired woman. "The trends change by the week, and we should always be keeping up with the change."

"Yes, Coco, I know," the faunus indulged. "Shall we go eat? I know this place that serves lovely croissants and the best chocolate cake. And Weiss did say that lunch is on her."

Ruby perked. Coco gave her teammate an amused look.

"I know what you are doing," the tallest of them said pointedly.

Velvet just smiled ambiguously. "I have no idea what you mean, Coco."

... 

Weiss, for her part, was not amused.

The preparations required for a wedding, she was unfortunate enough to discover, were insane.

This was especially so for someone with her status.

A number of things had also happened during this chaotic period. A minority had amused her. A fair bit had puzzled her. A lot had just made her outright groan. Most had tested her rapidly fraying temper.
And then there were those moments that she just did not want to ever remember and knew she would remember them anyway.

Yang, as an example, would be one of them.

And why?

Because the infuriating blonde had kidnapped her in broad daylight just as she was leaving the Schnee building, with Blake staring in astonishment.

"Yang, you idiot!" She was clutched tightly to the front of the bigger woman, who was speeding like a maniac on the Bumblebee, held there with a firm arm around her waist. "What do you think you are doing?!"

Sometimes, the fencer hated the fact that she was the smallest in size among team RWBY, and that Yang was the biggest. It gave Yang the advantage of being able to tower over her, and it unfortunately meant that Weiss was uncomfortably squished between the brute and the bike handles.

"Kidnapping my future sis-in-law!" Laughter.

"Of all the idiotic things - "

HOOOOOOOONKKKKK!

The motorbike swerved sharply.

"...Oh, whew, close call…"

"You dunce!"

The blonde laughed again, a bright, cheery sound on the road.

"Blake's going to murder you for this, just so you know!" Weiss shouted at her.

"Pffft. As if!" Yang scoffed, peering down at furious blue eyes and white hair that was flying haphazardly. "She loves me too much for that!"

"You little - Yang, eyes on the road!"

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONKKKKKKKKK!

Another swerve, sharper than the first.

"Er… hahaha… oops?"

Weiss snarled.

"Drive. Properly. You imbecile!"

... Eventually, and thankfully, they came to a stop.

They were at the Atlas Park. In the distance, there were children playing in the field, joggers, napping people… Why in the world did Yang bring her here?

Loosening the death grip she had on her teammate, Weiss stumbled two steps away from the
damnable bike. Her heart was still pounding at the adrenaline, and it was all Yang's fault.

She took a minute to compose herself before turning to glare at the blonde, mist blue eyes dark and furious.

"Yang Xiao-Long," she hissed, "Explain yourself right now."

"Calm down, ice queen," Yang said cheerily, kicking down the stand to hold the vehicle upright. "I just wanted to talk to you for a bit."

The gall.

"By kidnapping me?" she snapped. "You could have just asked."

Yang, the infuriating person that she was, mimed brushing an imaginary beard from her chin - for all appearances looking deep in thought as she stared at nothing in particular.

"I couuulld… but I didn't want to." Lilac eyes glanced over. "I wanted to talk to you in private, Weiss."

The former heiress's gaze narrowed. "And it's so hard to ask to talk in private?"

"Nope. This was just more fun."

Weiss's finger twitched, so very tempted to form a glyph for blasting the woman away. But instead, she pinched the bridge of her nose. Patience, she said to herself like a mantra. Patience. You are not supposed to kill your teammate, Weiss. Or your future 'sister-in-law' for that matter.

...But she could at least maim her. Right? It would be so, so worth the peace and quiet that came with it.

Then she remembered Ruby, her partner turned fiancee, and imagined the expression the younger woman would have.

The idea died before she could turn it into reality.

Letting loose a frustrated sigh, she spoke through gritted teeth. "What do you want, Yang?"

The blonde smirked, leaning back against her bike. "I thought it was about time we have a sisterly talk."

Her eyes narrowed.

"What about?"

"Come on. I've only one sister, and you're about to become my sister-in-law."

The shorter woman scowled. "If you are trying to give me the overprotective sister speech - "

"Nope, not it."

She frowned; Yang just waved at the air.

"I'm serious. You are a clever woman, Weiss." There was a slow and sure smirk forming on the brawler's face. "And I know you're smart enough to not hurt my precious little sister while I'm around, so I'm preeeettyy sure I don't need to discuss that with you."
...How offensive it was, the implied in that sentence.

Her scowl all but grew. The infuriating woman.

"Do not insult me," she bit out. "How dare you - "

"Aw, loosen up!" The blonde hopped off her bike, slung an arm over the irate president, and ignored the protests that followed. "I know you wouldn't anyway. Ruby has you wrapped around her finger!"

She felt her cheeks go hot.

"Yang," she hissed, struggling to get loose, "I swear, if you don't let me go right now and stop that - "

...And of course, the blonde responded by holding her closer in a crushing bear hug, squeezing the breath out of her before letting go.

Weiss straightened, looking very much like an offended cat with ruffled fur trying to be dignified. "Thank you," she said curtly. "Now -"

"Anytime, princess!"

Said princess shot Yang a withering glare that - again, annoyingly enough, seemed to just bounce off the blonde harmlessly like it did their faunus teammate.

"What do you want, Yang?" her hands crossed and she tapped her foot impatiently before a thought occurred to her. "And do keep in mind that you probably have another five minutes or so before Blake arrives," she added unsympathetically.

To Yang's credit, the blonde actually winced at the reminder and looked a little nervous.

In all fairness, it was quite unexpected to have Blake so paranoid over her safety. Weiss didn't actually realize how seriously her friend took the job until she hired the faunus.

But then again, her entire team had been obsessed over her safety for a short while after that one time she landed in the hospital.

It had been a bewilderingly uncomfortable experience.

It was also incredibly frustrating.

And… many things changed after that as well.

There were faint, lingering shadows that lurked beneath the gazes of her teammates now, the kind that had never been there before, and the sort that made a part of Weiss want to flinch in discomfort and guilt and managed not to purely by steeling herself.

Blake and Ruby had been affected deeply in different ways. In bad ways. It was harder to tell, with Yang, but those lilac eyes that burned crimson so quickly spoke volumes.

So did the tattered, stained gloves and knuckles that were scraped raw.

"Weiss," Yang was saying, gloves clean and unstained by blood, "how are you doing?"

She startled. "What?"
Lilac eyes narrowed.

Suddenly, the carefree aura that usually emanated from the blonde disappeared. Yang, for all the sunniness she may exude, could be more solemn than Blake and Weiss combined when the mood struck, rare though it may be.

The white-haired woman collected herself quickly. "What are you talking about?" she waved curtly. "I'm fine."

"Hmmmm."

She fought the urge to bristle under that piercing gaze and sighed. "Stop wasting my time. What do you want?"

Silence.

"Do you still have nightmares?"

Ice flooded her veins, and her hand twitched involuntarily.

Something like a cold blanket draped over her shoulders, and memories - ones that she had so desperately kept at bay once upon a time - returned to the forefront. Her hands curled into tight fists.

This, she thought mutely with a sudden realization.

This was why the blonde pulled her far from where Blake could potentially overhear them or sense the change in their bearings.

She didn't answer.

Yang's gaze lingered on her for a moment before drifting to the blue sky.

"I was right, huh?" the blonde murmured. "I had a feeling you were thinking about it, and thought you needed a little reminder."

She forced herself to speak.

"What… reminder?"

Yang responded by pulling Weiss back into her arms gently, one gloved hand resting on top of her head, and held her there.

She was too startled to respond to the sudden embrace.

And this close, she could feel the warmth of her teammate enveloping her, chasing away the chill that settled on her shoulders just moments ago, with a scent of something that reminded her of wild flowers and the sun.

"Remember that you are family," Yang said softly to her, and she could feel the rumbling of the words against her skin. "And if you need anything, you come to us. Okay?"

The warmth and affection in that voice was too much for Weiss.

Ruby was too much.
They were all too much.

She dragged out a long, slow breath that was almost shaky, and pushed herself away.

Yang didn't seem to mind, letting her go.

"Ah, crap," the blonde mumbled then, rubbing at the back of her neck. She was staring into the distance, down the road they came from.

Weiss, despite herself, looked too, and saw Blake hopping from tree to tree, loose black hair flying behind her, and amber eyes calm but burning with a kind of fond frustration reserved for Yang alone.

The faunus was clearly making a beeline for them, and when she was close enough, she leapt off the tree; a hand already lifted to smack the blonde on the head.

An outburst of protest - and the banter between her teammates filled the air.

For a moment, all the president did was watch. The tension in her shoulders loosened at the familiarity, and - and -

Well.

...Who was she kidding, really?

It was Weiss herself who had changed the most.

And not entirely for the better.

(She never did answer Yang's question.)

A/N - One of you asked me an interesting question. tg, to be specific. (From FFnet - but I thought I should describe my motives here as well)

Q: Are they straight but codependent, or lesbians in denial?

A: Atypical and Cobblestone was actually intended for me to test out the pairing and see if I could actually make it work. Don't get me wrong - I really do like WR. They have that kind of old married couple dynamics that are both humorous and also heart-warming to see.

But liking it, and convincing myself that it could work, are two slightly different things. I wanted it to work though, and that's also how I started writing the two mentioned fics, Cobblestone which had expanded to an absurd length when I was expecting to do something short, and Atypical that… is so obviously not a one-shot any longer. It's actually shaping up to be much longer than I want it to be.

So… in short, I didn't actually know the answer when I started writing this. I do now, but that's because I have already written up to a point where I had obtained an answer I can agree with. And you, my dear readers, will see what my answer is in the near future.

On other news, to those who offered to be guinea pigs - thank you. I'm sorry I couldn't get back to some of you personally though. The week that followed after I posted Part 2 had been incredibly hectic. I'm fairly sure I am certifiably insane for deciding to start writing again when I'm already juggling a full-time job and various other responsibilities… but, well. That's that.
Feedback, as always, are much appreciated. Thank you for reading!
Of course, where the president of Schnee Dust was concerned, no wedding could happen without a hiccups or two.

Red cloak fluttered in the air.

"This is the absolute worst idea you've ever had, Ruby Rose!" the white-haired woman hissed at her.

"Weiss, you say that every time..."

"And what do you think that implies about every idea you've ever had?"

The president of Schnee Dust had one arm tight around her partner's waist as she leapt from glyph to glyph that formed mid-air...away from the destruction behind them.

A nervous chuckle.

"But it worked!!" was the defensive response, even as Ruby spied Blake slowly approaching them, a hand pressed to the mic fixed by the ear as the faunus spoke into it. "They can't chase us anymore."

There was, she noted guiltily, fury in Blake's usually calm amber eyes - and she had a feeling it was because she got whisked away by White Fang goons in a moment of carelessness.

It was an event that culminated with a calm and glacial Weiss entering the warehouse alone to meet them as demanded. Unarmed.

And it was the second time in her entire life that she had been so terrified. That was when she tripled her efforts to get out of the aura bindings that leashed her down, because she would be damned if she let Weiss do this.

"By creating a typhoon that brought down the entire roof?" Weiss asked through gritted teeth as she brought them to the ground.

...In retrospect, she probably did overdo it a little.

Breaking the cuffs had taken a lot out of her, and then decimating the building took even more. That was why Weiss had to be the one to pull her out of there as opposed to her escaping by herself.

Ruby smiled thinly. "They tried to hurt you. Besides, I gave them enough time to get out before they could get crushed."

Something dark and vicious was giving its approval in her mind at the thought of giving them a taste of what they deserved.

The grip that Weiss had on her waist tightened - but for whatever reason, her partner didn't seem
inclined to respond to what she said.

Short dark hair ruffled with the wind, and silver eyes glanced back - only to squint at white and black garbed men who had surrounded the broken building, the Schnee symbol prominent on their sleeves and backs. "Your people are in battle with them, Weiss."

"I know." A curt, unreadable voice.

"Shouldn't we help?"

"No." The hand around her waist left then. "Blake has it handled. Do not join them, Ruby."

Ruby's gaze turned to see Weiss already moving to meet the faunus mid-way, a tense and set expression on her face.

Despite the exhaustion that she could feel draping over her shoulders like a dead weight, she kept pace - the icy note in her partner's voice was warning her not to push her luck, and it was probably for the better that she heeded it anyway.

Plus, Blake's men seemed to be handling the stragglers that escaped the warehouse well enough.

Said head of security was, also, assessing them both for injuries. But thankfully, though there were some cuts, scratches and probably a few nasty bruises that would form on Ruby by tomorrow, there was nothing life-threatening.

"When I said try to create a distraction," the faunus's voice was bone-dry, and most definitely directed at Ruby. "I didn't mean bring down the entire warehouse."

The leader of team RWBY couldn't really help the sheepish shuffling of her feet. "It worked?" she said meekly.

An aggrieved sigh from Weiss and a small, wry grin from Blake was the response.

"They roughed you up a little," Blake said then, looking mostly relieved but still concerned. "I'm taking you for a check up at the hospital."

A nod to Weiss - who was noticeably dusty but otherwise seemingly unharmed. "You too."

The president scowled, clearly not in the mood to be coddled. "You are not my keeper."

"I'm your bodyguard first, and head of security second. Your safety is my priority, Weiss." Blake paused. "And if you come along, Ruby won't have an excuse."

The scowl grew, but the point was made. Weiss didn't argue further.

"It's nothing major," Ruby mumbled despite feeling the strain and faint throbbing on her arms, wrists, cheek and stomach. Besides, the White Fang had been using her as bait, so they stopped short of seriously harming her. "And -"

"Don't even try, Ruby." Weiss cut in with a warning, deep tension still lining her shoulders, voice still icy and sharp.

She deflated.

Her partner was still wound up tightly over the entire fiasco, and Ruby knew there really wasn't much she could do about it right now. The curt words and not-quite-vocal anger had been quite
telling in describing just how upset Weiss was over the entire incident.

A loud, furious Weiss could be calmed down with the right approach.

But a quiet Weiss with scarily cold rage so clearly simmering just beneath the skin?

Blake's hand reached out to squeeze Ruby's shoulder lightly.

"It won't take long." There was an understanding and sympathetic look in those amber eyes. "I'll take us home right after that."

She sighed. "Okay."

..."Hey."

Silent as a ghost, Blake materialized by her side, settling down next to her in the waiting room of the hospital.

Weiss couldn't even muster the energy to be surprised, let alone be bothered to look up from where she sat, eyes still fixed on the scroll as she tapped at the panel.

"What is it?"

"The place is secured. I think we can rest a little easier now."

One of the multiple knots that had formed on her shoulders untangled itself.

"Right."

"All good with the doctor? You are out earlier than I expected."

She huffed. "I wasn't injured to begin with."

A nod. "Ruby should be out soon. I went over to have a look just now - aside from some scratches, cuts and bruises, she seems to have been left unharmed."

"Ah." Weiss didn't know what else to say to that.

Another few knots untangled themselves.

Still she tried to focus on the report she was reading. Considering all the things that she had shoved to the backburner when the entire fiasco came up, she would need to do a lot of catching up.

No better time than now, while they were waiting for Ruby to be done with her check up.

A book seemed to have somehow materialized in Blake's hands, already flipped open to a page with a yellow bookmark.

She swiped at the scroll again, opening another report to look through - this one was about experimentation on healing properties in dust, a project headed by Director Estheim himself.

Silence reigned in the room.

It was, quite frankly, too quiet even for her taste.
"Did you manage to get ahold of Yang?" Weiss asked then, one finger scrolling through the content on her device. The blonde had been underground (doing who-knows-what investigation) when the entire thing happened, and that had made it hard to get in contact.

"I did." A page was turned. "She's waiting at home."

"You managed to calm her down?"

"Wasn't too hard."

She wasn't too surprised. It likely helped that Ruby was relatively unharmed for the most part, and that the issue had come to a close before Yang actually found out about it. Had neither been the case… well.

It was probably for the better that Yang hadn't found out about it till it was over anyway.

Weiss was going to have to re-read the report by Estheim later. She was having a hard time focusing, and this was a project that needed more than her current ability to concentrate.

She bookmarked it and swiped to another report in an attempt to better distract herself.

"Yang asked how you were doing, too."

"I'm fine."

"Hmm."

Despite herself, she glanced up to look at her faunus teammate properly.

"What did you tell her?" Weiss asked suspiciously.

The corner of Blake's lips turned up. "That you are being yourself," was the vague response.

The white-haired woman scowled, but didn't bother to find out what that meant exactly. Knowing these two, one who was openly cheeky and the other deviously so when the mood struck, it was probably for the better of her sanity that Weiss didn't know anyway.

"...And what did she say to that?"

"She said to watch you and not let you 'fall over to the dark side'."

Her scowl deepened. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Well, you are brooding and feeling guilty even though Ruby's fine, aren't you?"

"I don't brood," she denied sullenly, more than a little disgruntled.

She was also more than a little tempted to say that was exactly what Blake used to do a few years ago, so the faunus really did not have sufficient moral high ground to call her out on it.

However, years of having spent time together with her team - with Blake - was more than effective in holding her tongue back before she could say something she would truly regret, regardless of how exhausted she was at the moment.

"If you say so," her teammate responded easily. "Try telling Yang that later if you like."
Weiss really had to suppress the urge to growl at the other. But rather than arguing further - because she rarely got anywhere when it came to arguments involving herself - the dust-wielder opted to turn back to her scroll instead.

Blake, for her part, didn't seem to mind being ignored. The faunus seemed content to stay where she was and read in silence, but was very pointedly not leaving her side.

Her teammate was letting her do whatever she want, brooding included.

Just not by herself.

She had to redouble her efforts to not let the emotions she had reigned in so tightly unravel themselves.

... Rapid knocks on the door.

Deliberately ignoring them, Weiss continued to focus on the main holographic monitor, reading through the report just sent to her. Around the table, floating screens of all sizes continued to glow with automatically scrolling information that she hadn't bothered to check at all.

Across the room, the knob on the door was being twisted open slowly.

A hesitant head with red-tipped black hair poked in.

"Weiss?"

She continued to tap at the monitor, typing out a response.

"Go to sleep, Ruby," she said without looking up. "You need to rest."

"...I'm fine."

Soft footsteps padded towards her.

She sighed, eyes closing momentarily. She didn't remember saying her partner could enter. Perhaps she should have locked the door?

But no, that would just raise alarm bells because she never made it a habit to lock her study when she was inside. Her teammates had a tendency to waltz in and out of her study whenever they wanted to be a nuisance.

The more traditional-minded on her board would have likely expressed their outrage at such disrespect. Yet, in the privacy of her own mind, Weiss could admit she probably would have ignored them if it ever came to that.

After all, this wasn't the Schnee Mansion.

It was home.

And her teammates knew better than to disturb her if she was in the middle of something important. Or at least Blake (and occasionally Ruby) did, and that was usually enough to prevent unnecessary interruptions.

But clearly, her partner didn't think now was such an occasion.
"What are you doing?" Ruby asked, hovering by the side of her chair.

"Surely," she said dryly, still tapping at her monitor. "that would be obvious?"

"Oh…"

Silence. For whatever reason, her partner seemed disinclined to speak, but Weiss could feel the thoughtful stare fixed on her.

She attempted to focus on the report, but that stare.

After a minute of struggling with her own patience, she caved with a deep, exasperated sigh. "Do you need something, Ruby?"

"...Yeah."

"What?" More tapping.

A pause.

"Will you look at me?"

Her hand stilled for a second - half a second - before it resumed its tapping on the holographic display.

"What kind of question is that?" Dismissive words. "I've looked at you plenty over the years - and now isn't really the time to request funny things from me, Ruby. I'm busy."

The younger woman grumbled something under her breath.

"Weiss," her partner sighed in exasperation, "you can be so silly sometimes."

She twitched. Her, silly? When Ruby was the one asking silly questions?

"What -"

Ruby reached over to tap at her monitor - promptly saving the files and sending it to sleep as the holographic screens above her desk faded. Then, unceremoniously, she sat on the table, set her hands on the armrests of Weiss's ridiculously big chair, and swiftly dragged it to properly face her.

And then she lifted both her legs to comfortably rest by the sides of the seat.

The closeness of their proximity forced the white-haired woman to lean back against the chair fully, not that the movement did anything particularly useful.

It, well, did help in providing sufficient space for them to look at each other properly.

But not so much in letting her leave without actually shoving Ruby away.

Weiss was trapped.

Their gazes met, silver and blue.

A long time ago, Weiss would have shouted at Ruby at the sudden - if not rude - action that brought them uncomfortably close together.

Now, she merely arched an aristocratic brow. "Since when did you become a brute?"
Ruby, with stray bandages and plasters on her face and hands while dressed in pajamas, squinted back at her in disapproval. It was a decidedly hilarious attempt at looking stern when her partner was clearly struggling not to pout, not that Weiss was going to tell.

"Since we came back from the hospital, when, you know, my partner started to ignore me."

"That's - " her mouth closed. "I wasn't ignoring you." Not intentionally.

Puffed out cheeks. "You could barely even look at me just now."

"What are you talking about?" The frustration was bleeding into her voice. "I am looking at you right now."

"Only because I made you look."

"That's not even the point." Weiss would know; she thrived on logical reasoning.

Ruby's head tilted.

"No?"

Silence.

"What do you want, Ruby?" she asked finally, not at all in the mood to begin another ridiculous argument with her partner that she was certain would begin if she argued back.

A crooked grin settled itself on the younger woman's features, the stray plaster covering a scab stretching with it. "I need you to not blame yourself."

She scowled. "What did Blake tell you?"

"She didn't tell me anything." The smile grew, part wry, part knowing, part exasperated. "We just know you, Weiss."

Her hands crossed. "I dragged you into this mess. I have the responsibility of making sure you get out of this unscathed."

"No, you don't." The words were firm. "I made you bring me in, remember?"

Her brows drew together, cataloguing the bandages scattered all over the younger woman again. "You cannot seriously tell me that you were not bothered by the fact that White Fang got their hands on you. It should have been me."

"We both knew these things could happen," Ruby said, still calm.

Her teeth clenched. "Be that as it may - "

"You said yourself that they no longer seemed to care whether it's human or faunus they go after."

"Yes, but - "

"I've had worse injuries than this, too, and not by White Fang."

"That's besides the point and - "

"A grimm could just as easily maul me one day, and it wouldn't be your fault, you know."
"They tortured you!" Weiss snapped at last, shoulders tense.

Silence.

For a second, her partner looked as if she was caught off guard. And then it was replaced with real, genuine sadness and compassion that made her want to look away.

She had to force herself to maintain eye contact.

"Did you really think I wouldn't figure it out?" she hissed. "You said all they did was beat you up, but I know the signs, Ruby. I know."

A ghost-like pain ran through her frame like a burning brand.

Her hands shook.

She curled them into tight fists.

A person does not get clean cuts from being beaten up, much less a long, thin slice along the neck.

No, this wasn't just torture.

This was revenge. Hatred.

Against her. Against the Schnee. Not Ruby. Her.

"I - " She breathed in deeply. "It should have been me."

Something flickered in silver eyes at her words.

And suddenly - something in Ruby's demeanor changed.

It was the look of a predator, a seasoned huntress - a dangerous being with deadly speed and skills. The hesitation and sadness that was prominent in that gaze a moment ago was no longer there, and in its place, anger.

Fury that was directed at her.

Ruby leaned in closer by a fraction, the grip she had on the armrests going white. If she had Yang's strength, the wood would have cracked.

"You walked into that warehouse unarmed," came the calm and deadly quiet words. "You were going to give them what they wanted. For me. You were about to let them gut you."

This close, with only centimeters between their faces, Weiss could see hints of wild, violent anger burning in gunmetal eyes; it brought everything about Ruby into sharp focus, perhaps even more so because she realized that the majority of that rage wasn't directed at her - it was at White Fang.

It made her heart ache to see that.

Her partner was often so cheerful, even during those times when she had the role of a leader to play. Rarely was she ever like this, and perhaps… perhaps that was why those words felt so devastating.

Then, abruptly, the anger vanished, and another crooked smile took its place on Ruby's features.
Their foreheads touched.

She tensed. Ruby had always been entirely too touchy feely and affectionate and she just… wasn't.

"You didn't fail me," the younger woman said softly. "If anything, if you'd gotten hurt or died… I would be the one who'd failed you."

There was a flicker of haunting vulnerability in silver eyes, reminding her of a time when she had been hurt so badly that it had sent her partner into mindless, boiling rage.

It was enough to make Weiss sag back into her seat and want to run a frustrated hand down her face. "Ruby, that's not -"

"I get it." Hands reached over to bring her close. "You want to protect me. But it's the same for me too, you know."

Now, was that not the irony of this situation?

She sighed, letting Ruby hug her despite her misgivings, and letting her partner's warmth soothe the mixture of trembling rage, guilt and icy fear that had settled in her veins for the entire day. Most had tapered down somewhat by the time they got back from the hospital, but…

Weiss knew those were feelings that would linger in her for a long time to come like a persistent phantom.

"Plus," her partner continued, "they barely even started when you guys came. I won't even scar or anything - you heard what the doctor said."

She felt more tired than she should be. Her eyes closed.

Ruby nuzzled into her white hair, sighing - in relief? - too.

"I'm so glad you're safe," the younger woman mumbled.

She wanted to bark out an incredulous laugh. Ruby was the one injured and yet her concern was directed at Weiss?

"You," she muttered into the crook of her partner's neck, completely resigned, "are impossible."

Ruby just squeezed with a soft chuckle.

Weiss allowed it, but only briefly, before she untangled herself from her partner's grip.

She looked up at the younger woman again, only for her gaze to stray to the bandages and plasters once more, as well as the specks of red and blue-black bruises that were slowly forming.

Despite herself, her hand reached out to brush against the plaster on the cheek.

"Does it still hurt?"

Ruby brightened, leaning into the touch.

"Nope! I'm fine."

Her touch lingered for a moment longer before moving to the bandage on the neck, pressing down with deliberate pressure. The younger woman stiffened - unable to suppress the small flinch of pain
- and caught her hand immediately.

Weiss couldn't help but smile at that - a touch sad, maybe a little peeved and amused both, but mostly weary and resigned.

"You are such a liar, Ruby Rose."

Her hand was squeezed gently, and Ruby didn't quite look all that sincerely repentant with a grin that was altogether frustratingly adorable and sheepish and infuriating.

"You love me anyway, partner."

The little imp. When did she get so cheeky?

She tugged her hand out of that grasp and responded by flicking Ruby on the forehead.

"Ow!"

"Go to sleep before I strangle you, dolt."

Her partner sulked, rubbing at the sore spot. "What did I do?"

Aside from scaring her half to death, making her emotionally shaky, and then carelessly doing things that bewildered her terribly when she was already confused by her own feelings?

Absolutely nothing.

Right.

She dragged out a long, slow breath.

"You have made your point," Weiss said instead, if a bit wryly. "You should sleep now. Doctor's orders, if you recall. Please get off my table."

The other seemed to contemplate it for a moment. "Are you going to sleep?"

"Soon. I just need to sort out the report I was reading and a few other things - " a pointed look, "items that I likely would have finished earlier if you had not turned off my monitor and disturbed me."

Ruby blew into the air, causing loose strands of black hair to fly up. She didn't look apologetic over the entire affair at all.

"You and your few other things - Weiss, the last time you said that, you were here the entire night."

"I'm backlogged. And no, it shouldn't take the entire night - "

"You said that last time too."

Blue eyes narrowed.

Ruby stared back stubbornly.

Weiss sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose.

"You are not going to leave me alone till I get out of this room, are you?"
"Nope."

Silence.

Then, with another aggravated sigh, she caved.

"...Fine."

It was far too much effort to argue with Ruby when she had that willful pout on her face, and deep down, Weiss knew it would be just a matter of time before she surrendered to her partner's continued wheedling if she had argued.

And Ruby, being the little monster that she was, cheered.

...

A/N - I have no idea if aura cuffs or something like that exists/will exist canonically in RWBY. But I'm going to assume it will. And Ruby... she created a mini-typhoon that cracked the wall in Beacon's canteen at age fifteen. She's going to be deadlier at twenty-one, I imagine.

I also remember thinking I had a few other things to say about this chapter... but the past week had been entirely too hectic, and I can't remember them anymore. Ehh. Oh well.

Okay, I do remember one. There's a small, funny continuation from the last scene of this part that I couldn't resist writing but eventually scrapped... I seriously considered making it canon (to this fic), but eventually decided against it. You can find it on tumblr, if you're interested, but otherwise no biggie.

Thanks to Astarael00 for beta-ing. Feedback as always are much appreciated, and thanks for reading!
Bzz - bzzt.

She was weak and tired from the poison invading her system, but the person in front of her, she recognized, was her partner.

"Weiss..." a gasping breath. Her insides were on fire.

The long red blade glinted in the moonlight, cold and sharp against her neck.

"Release her."

"Why should I?" the man holding her upright asked.

The grip on Mytrenaster tightened.

"Your target is me. She has nothing to do with it."

"I'm still not seeing a why."

Mist blue eyes narrowed.

The sound of a rapier smoothly cutting through air, followed by a stab into the ground.

"...Oh?" Curiosity.

"Give her the antidote and release her. If you do, I will come with you." A pause. "You have my word."

Something like icy fear settled in her stomach. "Weiss - no - " the grip that the man had on her tightened, and she choked out a cough.

He seemed to consider the offer for a moment. "If I don't?"

Weiss smiled, something malevolent and ruthless in her cool gaze. "Would you care to find out?"

It sent a shiver down her spine. She never knew Weiss could look that cold.

"Hmm."

A chuckle.

"You would give yourself to an enemy who loathes you over a girl?" Amusement. "When we already have your sister? The SDC would be crippled without one of you to head it, would it not?"

"Do we or do we not have a deal?" Weiss did not care to banter.
A snort. "Very well, Schnee. But I don't trust you."

Something was tossed over.

Her partner bent, slowly, to pick it up.

"Clasp that to your wrist," was all he said. "I'm sure you know what it is."

A fist tightened around it.

"The antidote for her first."

"No," he said simply. "Put that on, and I'll let you feed her the antidote."

Gritted teeth. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"I suppose you will just have to, Schnee."

Silence.

Their gazes met, silver and blue.

One burning with fierce intensity, the other filled with pain and fear. She tried to say something, but her mouth refused to move. Her body was being stabbed with needles from inside out, and her vision was fading.

And then Weiss's calm voice was cutting through the haze of pain.

"Fine."

Something clicked.

A sharp grunt.

"How does it feel to have your aura cuffed, Schnee?"

The jibe was ignored. "The antidote, White Fang."

The grip around her loosened, and she staggered back to the ground, her back hitting the wall as she slumped, unable to hold her own weight.

She gasped for breath.

Her partner was suddenly next to her, uncorking a bottle and pressing it to her lips. Something thick and bitter flowed past her tongue, and she choked - half at the taste, half from the uncontrollable shudders going through her frame - and coughed it out.

"Ruby, you need to drink it." Anger and worry.

But she could only gasp, her blood on fire.

The other breathed in deeply.

A hand reached around her neck, tilting her face up properly. And then Weiss was kissing her, cold liquid flowing from one mouth to another, firm hands holding her there and waiting until she swallowed.
She tasted something like mint underneath the harsh tang.

Her vision blurred until all she could see was concerned mist blue; the ruthlessness prominent in it moments prior seeming to have vanished.

A stray lock of black hair was tucked behind her ear as she was arranged to rest against the wall more comfortably.

"You will be fine." Soft words.

"W-Weiss..." she croaked out.

A brush of lips against her forehead.

"Yang should be on the way," Weiss said quietly. "I have set the signal on your scroll. I'm sorry you got involved."

The briefest of a pause.

"And thank you for everything, Ruby."

It was a soft goodbye.

Her partner stood then, taking a step back, and turning to the red-haired man who was waiting for her. White hair shone in the air, fluttering gently with the wind; the Schnee symbol prominent on her back - it was almost as if she glowed in the moonlight.

Mytrenaster, embedded into the ground and gleaming, was abandoned by its master.

And the darkness of the night was swallowing the light belonging to Weiss Schnee, one step at a time.

Bzz - bzzt.

Ruby stepped further into the room, a hand tight around her scythe.

"...She's not here." Behind her, Blake, full of tension.

A fist slammed into the wall, cracking it, and crimson eyes flashed dangerously. "This trail was fake too."

Her eyes remained fixed on the wall in front of her.

She bent down.

Half-dried blood was smeared on the lower end of the wall, such that she could tell it got there only because someone was slumped against it before.

Her hand lifted to touch it.

It was cold, almost damp.

So recent, and so, so very red...

And in the air, there was a lingering scent of snow and ice, ghostly enough that she thought she was imagining it.
But instinctively, she knew she wasn't.

Her partner had been here.

"...It wasn't fake," she whispered.

"Ruby?" Yang.

"We were too late. They moved."

They had two trails to follow, and they picked the wrong one.

She picked the wrong one.

This was another mistake that would haunt her for life.

Bzz - bzzt.

Two weeks passed.

Wild, violent rage burned in her, intermingled with crippling fear and crushing guilt.

In her hand, she fisted in a tattered and bloodied white jacket with the Schnee symbol on it.

It was what Weiss had worn that day, a harsh reminder that they had been one step too late again.

Always too late.

How long before too late turned into permanent death?

She glared at the man in front of her.

Behind her, a few blocks down, were the teammates and friends she had left behind to chase after him - and even this far away she could hear the faint sounds of gunfire and explosions ringing in the air.

"Such loyalty to the Schnee," he mused calmly, despite that his blood was steadily dripping down his stomach, his crimson sword - snapped into half from their last altercation - loose in his grip.

"What has a loathsome person like her done to inspire such dedication?"

"You know nothing about Weiss," she said through gritted teeth.

He tilted his head. "Was it because she saved you? But then again, she was the reason you were poisoned in the first place. Your loyalty is misplaced, girl."

"You are wrong," Tight words. "It's not about loyalty."

"Am I?" He wondered. "But I suppose you could be right. She did turn herself over to us for you, after all."

Something ice-cold settled in her stomach. "What did you do to her?"

"Nothing more than she deserved."

The hand holding the bloodied jacket twitched.
A harsh, savage snarl. "You bastard."

The first true and genuine smile curled on his lips, cold and ruthless.

"No more than a Schnee is."

He twisted the grip he had on his broken red sword, angling it to face her.

Blood steadily dropped to the cement floor, pooling by his boots.

"One of us shall die here today, girl."

Such a simple declaration.

And it was true, especially when it was clear he would choose death over providing information.

"Yes," she whispered. "That is true."

Her grip on the scythe tightened.

\textit{Bzz - bzzt.}

Fire. So much fire.

And in her arms was her partner, breathing faintly and too frail, white hair stained red, clothes tattered and blood dripping steadily down the limp arm.

They found her.

They had found her at long last.

Smoke in the air.

It was suffocating.

"Yang!" Blake shouted, Gambol Shroud flying to slam another person into the crumbling wall. "Come on, we have to get out of here!"

A dark, deep snarl.

Ember Celica, red and bloodied, crunched into another jaw.

The sound of the weapon reloading another dust bullet.

A sharp, staggering clank.

"Move," Yang growled, "Get out of my way, Jaune!"

He swallowed nervously, faltering at the furious glare.

Then he hardened.

"No," was the firm word. The leader of team JNPR dug his heels into the floor, grunting against the pressure of her fist. Blue eyes flashed. "We have to go. Your teammate needs a medic, and this building won't last."

Something like rationality flickered in crimson eyes, and her gaze darted back to Ruby - her sister
who had been quiet.

Too quiet.

Pyrrha and Ren hovered close by, alert and cautious of ambushes. Ordinarily the youngest huntress of them all would be able to defend herself easily, but she was in no position to do so now.

"Yang," Ruby whispered at last, hands curled around her still partner. "Please."

The brawler breathed in sharply.

Bzz-zzt.


White walls.

Beige tiles.

The scent of blood and antiseptic.

"- Weiss Schnee will recover. I do not foresee any complications... physically, that is. Her aura is strong, and to her advantage."

She should be happy.

But she wasn't.

The doctor's face grew grim.

"Her sister...is a different matter altogether, unfortunately."

A hollow victory was all it had been.


... 

She jerked awake, breathing hard.

Sweat dotted her forehead.

It was too dark.

The memory of her failure was coming back with a vengeance, tonight, and she let out a shuddering breath. And earlier today, she had almost lost her partner again -

Immediately, she threw the blanket off her, and stumbled out of her room.

Her partner's room was just opposite hers, and -

She needed to see her.

Needed to convince herself that Weiss was breathing, unharmed, warm and alive -

The door to the fencer's bedroom was jerked open.
Silence.

Despite the rough movement, and despite that Weiss was generally a light sleeper, there was no indication that the older woman had been roused.

And this far, all Ruby could see was a still frame covered in blankets, and hints of white that reflected the moonlight coming in from the window.

Was she sleeping?

...Or was she dead?

The young huntress swallowed.

Shutting the door quietly, she made her way to the bed slowly.

She didn't know what she was going to do if she had been dreaming up a Weiss who had been well and healthy since that time.

Was it all just... a figment of her imagination?

It was an irrational thought.

It had to be, because who else had she hugged just hours prior in Weiss's study?

The warmth was real. The feeling of her partner in her arms was real.

But if she was wrong…

Her feet trembled with each step.

If Weiss was truly gone, she didn't know what she would do.

She promised - she *swore* - that she would prevent her partner from getting hurt so badly ever again, but if she had already failed, then what was it all for?

She wouldn't ever see those mist blue eyes that burned so fiercely with life ever again, she wouldn't see that rare and precious half-affectionate smile that made her want to grin whenever she managed to make it happen, she wouldn't hear the soft melodies that took her breath away every time. All that would be left was a phantom memory and if she had truly lost her partner then what was she going to do -

A loud, choked noise.

She clamped her mouth shut, tried valiantly to calm her breathing that had gone ragged, but it was too late.

The person underneath the blanket stirred.

A hint of blue.

She froze three steps from the bed.

"Ruby...?" A voice thick with sleep. "What are you -?"

But still she just stared.
"Ruby?" Her partner was well and truly awake now, slowly sitting up; a hand brushed loose bangs away, and in the quiet room that was bathed in the moonlight, mist blue eyes - confused and concerned - were fixed on her.

Alive.

A familiar thrum of hysterical relief ran through her veins, and it made her shoulders shake, something in her stomach going icy cold and hot all at once.

It wasn't her imagination.

Her partner was here, alive and well and safe.

Weiss stared back, confusion giving way to realization - and Ruby… Ruby just stood there. She didn't know what to do with herself.

And then, her partner spoke.

"Come here."

She didn't, unwilling and afraid. Her usual confidence was gone, the bravado and recklessness ingrained in her missing.

If she went, would Weiss shatter?

But the voice was firm.

"Ruby." The soft words beckoned her, missing the usual curtness, yet still commanding.

It was like an instinctive motion to obey, when it came to Weiss. So she did move this time, slowly, much like a hesitant and vulnerable child lulled by her parent.

She stopped by the side of the bed.

But still she didn't dare reach out. What if she was wrong? If this was really just a figment of her imagination? If this was just a dream and then she'd wake up and her partner wasn't there?

What if -

A hand grasped her wrist and she jerked.

Weiss ignored the flinch, pulling her down, and a thumb was pressing against moisture on her cheek -

She was crying.

Why was she crying?

And those blue eyes - why did they look so sad again? The last time her partner had that look - it was just a bare glimpse, but when Weiss had accepted her proposal -

She was the one who had put that look on Weiss's face.

A wave of guilt flooded her.

Another choked whimper.
"W-Weiss - I -"

"Shut up and listen."

The blanket was pulled up to cover them - her, mostly, from head to toe, Weiss's head and shoulders were still above it - and the noise of the outside world was muffled.

And this close, with the faint imprint of warmth from under the blanket cocooning her, and those arms around her, pressing her close to the chest - all she could hear was the calm, steady heartbeat belonging to her partner.

The familiar scent of snow and ice washed over her.

It made her burrow deeper into that embrace, wanting to feel the drum of the heartbeat better, wanting to let it soothe her raw nerves -

Her fingers fisted in soft clothes.

"Hear that, you dolt?" her partner asked then, a careless, soft voice penetrating through the insulation of a blanket.

She sniffled.

Weiss sighed, chin resting on top of Ruby's head, easing a hand through messy dark hair.

"Typical of you," the other murmured, and there was something like lingering, wry humor and exasperation in her words. "To be an idiot just hours after you claimed I was being silly. Do you realize how hypocritical that is?"

Gentle though it may be - in a Weiss kind of way - it was still a scolding, a rebuke.

But all it did was make her want to curl up next to her partner.

"You have saved me, Ruby," the older of them went on to say, "Isn't it about time you believed that?"

She made a noise like disagreement, fisting in on the clothes more tightly.

Another resigned sigh. "Still so stubborn?"

She didn't respond, pressing deeper into her partner, letting the steady heartbeat wash over her.

"One day," Weiss said then, "you will tell me how to make you start believing it."

There was a mishmash of sadness and anger and weary affection bleeding into that soft voice.

"I will do as you require," fingers ran through her hair gently, "And then you will obey me when I tell you to stop being a fool, Ruby Rose."

Her partner meant every word, she could tell.

It made her choke out a strangled sob.

"I don't know how," she whispered at last, hoarse and raw, the first words she had spoken since the nightmare caught her in its grasp and refused to let go.
There was the briefest of a pressure on the top of her head; Ruby thought Weiss might have just dropped a rare kiss there - and then the arms around her tightened.

"I will wait until you do."

She breathed shallowly.

"Why?"

"I have already waited this long," was the calm response. "A little while more won't make a difference."

Waited this long…?

Ruby had been flitting from town to town, never too far from reach, yet far enough that contact couldn't be frequent. On the surface, she did it because she wanted to fulfill her dream - and not that it wasn't true, but - but.

It was also because she had been running, desperately, from the nightmare that haunted her.

Running from herself.

From her partner.

And Weiss had been waiting?

She shot up from the embrace, suddenly hovering over her partner, the blanket sliding off her head and pooling on her shoulder blades.

In the room bathed by the moonlight, their gazes met, one calm and the other unsure.

"...You knew why I left?" her question was small and shaky. She was sure she had given the impression it was because she wanted to fulfill her dream; something easy enough to do because it was true. It just wasn't exactly at the top of her to-do list then.

Had she underestimated her partner?

Mist blue eyes, sure and steady, remained fixed on her.

"Of course I did."

Her mouth opened. Closed.

"How?"

The corner of Weiss's lips curled up into a faint, crooked smile that made her feel as if her heart and soul had been grasped tightly by the other.

"We are partners."

Such a simple response.

Her next question was a whisper.

"But why didn't you say anything?"

Cool, slender fingers touched at her cheek, a rare gesture of affection, brushing at another tear that
was making its way down her face.

"Little red fool," Weiss said then, something like exasperation and wry amusement lining her gentle words. "Is the answer not obvious?"

It was obvious, she supposed.
She had just been too caught up with herself to see it.
The words were out of her lips before she realized what she was saying.

"I'm going to kiss you now."
Weiss looked truly caught off-guard at the sudden remark.

"What?" was the startled question, a faint flush rising to her partner's cheeks.

"It's not our first time," Ruby pointed out, feeling oddly like a stranger hearing herself speak, remembering the faint and almost lost taste of mint on her tongue.

She wanted to taste it again, and a deep-seated hunger for her partner that she never knew existed was stirring in her stomach.

"Wha - I - I was giving you the antidote at that time!"

"I know." Her head tilted, closing in.

A stuttered breath. "Ruby - "

She paused, watching mist blue eyes, seeing the flicker of hesitation and apprehension, a turmoil of warring emotions lurking beneath that intense gaze.

"This will change things between us," Weiss whispered uncertainly.

"Things had already changed," she returned, just as quiet. "A long time ago."

"It was - "

She didn't want to hear an argument.

She crashed their lips together, clumsy and messy but so real - Weiss froze, but then a hesitant hand was curling around the back of her head, the reciprocation to her rougher movements cautious and measured.

She sought entrance, her partner gave it, and then she was tasting mint on her tongue and she wanted more; fingers raked through her hair as she pressed closer.

It was Weiss who broke it first, head turning with a breathless gasp, and then she was there, chasing.

"Ruby - " A faint, trembling whisper.

Anything that her partner could have said was swallowed in another fierce kiss, this one deeper and hungrier.

She was still too rattled, and the nightmare had branded into her the familiar feeling of helpless
rage and crushing guilt. Listening to Weiss's heartbeat, and hearing her speak had abated it some, but it wasn't enough. And - and -

There was something between them, nurtured with time and a deep, encompassing bond, one that not even Weiss would deny - and yet it was one that had gone unacknowledged for so long.

But it was there, raw, intense and all-consuming, as natural as anything it could ever be.

It was real.

. . .

A/N - Umm. Not my best chapter. I feel like there's something off somewhere. But I suppose it's clear why I had to cut off a certain extra scene that wouldn't fit in properly.

I was honestly resisting the temptation to write them together since the last two chapters, especially since the timing for it didn't feel right yet… but there was only so much resistance I could put up before I caved. Here's to hoping this felt like the right time for you as it was for me.

Credits to Astarael00 for beta-ing. Feedback as always are much appreciated - especially since I just can't figure what felt off here. I get the feeling I may have to come back to this at some point and do a bit of revision… but I guess we will see. Thanks for reading!

Also, to fellow authors - you should check this link if you are not yet aware of it. One of mine was actually there a couple days ago before it mysteriously disappeared when I checked it today... yeah. Not cool. I had never actually deigned it necessary to say things like do not post my stories elsewhere without permission and all that mumbo jumbo, but I suppose it's time to start.
Ruby had woken up alone, body aching faintly from the injuries she'd sustained.

If it wasn't for the creases on the bed next to her and the half open blanket, she might have believed she was imagining the night before.

But then the fact that she was in her partner's neat and large room was telling in itself. Walls the color of ice blue, shelves with neatly stacked books, a dressing table by the corner with items she could not even begin to name… The door to the walk-in closet was shut, and so was the one to the bathroom.

It was completely silent.

A clear indicator that Weiss wasn't in either of them.

She glanced at the window briefly, blanket drooping down from where it half-covered her head.

Light grey skies looked back at her.

...It was still too early.

Where was her partner?

She pressed her face back into the pillow, breathing in the lingering scent of snow and ice. There was no imprint of heat belonging to Weiss left even with the blanket - that meant the other had left the room a while ago.

Somehow, Ruby wasn't entirely too surprised by the disappearance of her partner. Knowing Weiss, the white-haired woman probably needed some time to… think. Assimilate what happened.

And so did she, perhaps.

She wasn't willing to lose Weiss. At all. To anything. And to anyone.

That had grown startlingly clear since last night.

It was an odd sensation - the feeling of possessiveness - and it was one that she did not think she could ignore now that it came roaring at her with a vengeance, spiteful at the very fact that Ruby had rebelliously stomped it down with the nightmare that haunted her for so long.

Rolling over, she got off the bed, and went in search for her partner.

She checked the study. Empty.


The lounge, no one.
Lounge room the second, also known as the playroom with all their video games, card/board games, a snooker table (Weiss refused to get a pool table), ping pong table and just about any other entertainment that they had collected since their time at Beacon - again, no one.

Library, empty.

Kitchen, a fresh pot of coffee brewing by the island table. Hmm.

But still no Weiss.

Ruby slid into the tall chair, staring at the clouds of steam rising from the pot. Where else could her partner be? The house was big, but not *that* big. Weiss wouldn't step into the basement (that had long since been turned into her workshop), so there wasn't any point checking there. No reason to be in the garage or the armory where they stocked up Dust for emergency use either.

A cold trickle of fear licked at her.

Where was she? Did she leave home? But no, Weiss would have taken Blake along if that was the case. It was literally a given, unless something truly extraordinary cropped up.

It was too cold to be in the gardens, even if Weiss could've potentially gone out there…

No, wait. The training hall. She didn't check there yet. It wasn't a place that Weiss really frequented anymore, but... that was the only other place Weiss could be at.

And given the events yesterday and the day before…

Alarm bells begun to ring in her.

Weiss, for all appearances, may not seem like she had been overly affected. But... beneath that all-too-familiar poker face...

Ruby jumped off the seat and zoomed out the door, hopping past the large and chilly garden and towards the hall. Even at this distance, she could see the tell-tale signs of dust being used; ice blue light flickering through the window.

Weiss was there.

A sense of relief washed over her, the tense knot between her shoulders - a remnant of the nightmare from last night - uncoiling. But with it fading, a nervous energy begun to thrum in her blood.

She stepped into the hall, and immediately, an unnatural wind that only Dust could cause touched at her skin.

Weiss stood in the middle of the hall, dressed in a long-sleeved ivory blouse and the combat skirt she rarely wore anymore save for when she wanted to train, white hair that would've flown haphazardly tied up in its usual asymmetry.

Myrtenaster was angled down to face the floor, the pale blue balls of light forming in front of her and flying towards the target in the shape of a cube that was being juggled mid-air with each successive hit.

And how accurate her partner was, the box-thing - which was really just the size of her fist - never straying too far from its current height.
The strikes were perfectly measured, be it in velocity, strength, or timing.

It was a sign of how skillful Weiss was as a Dust wielder... and truly, her abilities were a sight to behold, beautiful and elegant as they were.

...And the bullets were still forming mid-air continuously with each hit with barely any break in between.

She glanced up at the juggled cube, for the first time noticing how dented it was beginning to look.

How long had Weiss been at this?

She looked back at her partner, suddenly realizing that the hand holding the rapier was trembling from exertion and her shoulders were heaving.

The alarm bells ringing in her rose to a crescendo.

She swallowed.

"...Weiss?" Ruby called tentatively, a far cry from her usual exuberance. Her partner couldn't be forced to stop from this, she knew. That would have...made her angry.

The president didn't turn, but the white head had tilted slightly in acknowledgement. Another set of blue bullets formed, even as her partner raised Myrtenaster.

The smooth sound of air being cut reached her ears. This time, all the balls sped towards the cube, decimating it completely as broken pieces of it dropped to the floor.

For an entire minute, it was completely silent.

Then the rapier clattered to the floor, her partner clutching at her trembling left hand as she dropped to her knees with a harsh gasp.

"Weiss!" Alarmed, she sped towards the older woman, skidding to the floor next to her.

Mist blue eyes, burning with fierce intensity, glared at her shaking hand.

"I'm fine," were the words said through gritted teeth.

"No you aren't!" Ruby almost shouted, grabbing at her partner's warm wrist, holding it steady as the other held firm on the elbow. "Weiss, you know you shouldn't have - "

"Don't." Weiss growled, harsh and dark, reminiscent of a time that hurt her deeply. "Don't tell me what I shouldn't do, Ruby."

Something coiled tightly in her chest.

She inhaled deeply, and looked right at furious mist blue, shoulders squaring.

"Then breathe. Slow your breathing." She was still grasping at her partner's arm carefully, willing the harsh trembling that ran through that slender hand to go away.

For a moment, Weiss just glared at her like she was an enemy; the muscles in that arm tensing until it felt almost like hot steel wrapped in cloth.

And it hurt so badly to see that directed at her.
Any moment now, her partner was going to lash out, and Ruby would bear the brunt of it. But she forced herself to remain steadfast, holding that wild, icy look with her pleading one.

"Please." Her words were quiet. "Please, Weiss. Don't do this again."

Weiss's jaw clenched.

It felt like an eternity before the white-haired woman seemed to finally heed her words, blue eyes closing shut with a shaky breath, a drop of sweat trickling down her face.

The pure relief that soared in her blood almost made her weep.

"That's it," she whispered, maybe cracked out. "Breathe."

With each slowing and steadier breath Weiss took, the trembling of her arm lessened. She reached out, one hand still holding the shaking wrist while the other touched at her partner's back; angled Weiss to sit on the cold floor gently, letting the legs stretch slightly.

The tension in that hand eased, muscles turning soft and lax the way they usually were. Then, the older woman lifted her other hand - also trembling slightly - to press at the face, inhaling deeply.

"Ruby," a long, dragging sigh - one that was so tired, so haunted and so, so vulnerable.

Her heart ached.

She moved to brush loose bangs of white hair away. "You are okay," she said softly, finally letting go of the wrist to curl her hands around her partner. "You're okay, Weiss."

"I'm sorry," came the faint, lost words. "I thought I was better."

"Shh. It's okay." Her eyes closed, breathing in the scent of snow and ice as she held Weiss closer. "You're better."

A weak huff. "Evidently not."

"You are," she said softly into white hair, proceeding to point out a particularly glaring fact. "You are letting me hug you."

"That's because you don't listen when I say not to."

"Still letting me," was her logical response. "And you let me kiss you last night too."

The person in her arms tensed. Maybe flushed? Ruby couldn't quite see given their current position.

"That's not - " Weiss cut herself off and then fairly groaned into her collarbone. "Why do I even argue with you?"

She couldn't help but smile at that. "That's a good question. Why do you argue with me, Weiss?"

A deep, tired sigh. "Don't make me strangle you, Ruby."

"Alright, I won't," she acceded, settling for hugging her partner more tightly. "I'll just hold you,
kay?"

Another huff. "Just shut up and kiss me."

If that wasn't permission given, Ruby didn't know what else it would be. So she lifted a hand to brush against the smooth jaw line and stray locks of white hair, leaned in, and let the silence in the hall wash over them.

Maybe it was the warring emotions going through Weiss, or maybe it was the bone-deep weariness, but the way her partner kissed back wasn't cautious the way it was last night. It was rough and uninhibited with all the tightly coiled frustration, pain and anger bleeding into it -

And Ruby relished that Weiss wasn't avoiding her touch, if not sinking into it completely.

For the briefest moment when those mist blue eyes had looked at her like she was an enemy, if not a complete stranger, her confidence had taken a spiral down while the feeling of fear - one that she had felt before - rattled her deeply.

But her partner was not lost to her, this time. And the relief that trembled in her - the relief.

When they parted, their foreheads touched.

Weiss's eyes were still closed, but there was a familiar, troubled furrow on those white brows that Ruby wanted to rub away with her thumb. The dust wielder frowned too much as it was, already.

The person in her arms sighed shakily, slumping completely against her with uneven breaths, head now resting against her shoulder.

The soft, chilly wind from outside brushed against them, and she nuzzled against soft white hair, breathing in the scent of snow.

"...Why are you in your pajamas?"

She blinked; glanced at herself briefly. She was still wearing her usual sleep clothes with stray bandages and plasters scattered all over her body.

"Er... I just got out of bed."

"Oh."

More silence.

"Why did you wake up so early?" she asked tentatively then.

What she didn't ask, and what she really wanted to ask, was what had triggered that… that. Because Ruby wasn't lying when she said her partner was better. Had gotten better.

Physically, Weiss had recovered well. And it wasn't that her arm had been injured to the point she could not wield Myrtenaster properly. She could wield it just fine. She had. It was just… the scars. The unseen, intangible ones that no aura or medicine could heal and were perhaps more crippling than any lasting physical injury could ever be.

Her partner had changed, even if for all appearances she seemed like the same person before it happened. But Weiss she still was, and Ruby wasn't going to lose that.

"...I just woke up early, that's all."
That was the only response her partner gave. It wasn't the answer she wanted, or an explanation, but then again Ruby hadn't actually been expecting one.

She had some inkling as to what they were about anyway.

Her partner had too many demons in the closet, and that number had increased exponentially since they graduated from Beacon. Yesterday, she knew, was another one added, even if she had tried to make sure that Weiss didn't blame herself yesterday over her capture.

Demons…

Were the roles not reversed later that night as well? When her own nightmare gripped her and refused to let go, and Weiss had to be the one to reassure her again?

And now the roles were reversed once more.

The irony. What a pair they make.

Her eyes closed.

"Okay," she said then, soft and accepting. "If you say so, Weiss."

... 

This was how Yang came across them.

Something in pieces - probably one of those cube targets - at the end of the hall.

Myrtenaster, carelessly dropped on the floor in the center.

And in contrast, by the side of the hall - her sister, sitting down and leaning against the wall, with hands circled loosely around the side of Weiss's stomach. The white-haired woman had sagged sideways and completely into Ruby's embrace, body tucked in between half-outstretched legs, head turned inwards and against the side of Ruby's jawline.

Snow-colored hair was loose and fluttering gently with the quiet wind, the tiara removed and placed on the floor next to them.

And with the sun shining in from the window, cascading around them and mixing with the shadows of the hall - it almost looked like an intimate scene from one of the romantic movies Yang had watched.

Any other time, Yang would've thought they were in the middle of something private, and perhaps even called them out on it, the very privilege of an affectionate older sister and teammate.

But the shadows in Ruby's watchful gaze and the silence in the air spoke volumes.

Gunmetal eyes turned to meet her lilac ones.

...Well, one of them appeared to be fine, at least. Even if - her gaze strayed to the bandages - recovering from injuries. Her lips turned downward in a frown at seeing them again, regret and guilt licking at her.

Yang should have been there. Even if she knew Ruby was strong, and completely capable of taking a few hits… She should have been there.

But this was not the time to think about what ifs, now that her sister's attention was on her.

Yang's head jerked at Weiss in a silent question instead.

*Asleep,* Ruby mouthed back.

Oh.

Her shoulders loosened despite herself.

That was...good.

It was also bad.

She made her way to them as quietly as she could, searching for anything that was amiss. Her other hand also reached for her scroll, flicking it open to tap out a message to Blake.

*Found them. Training hall.*

The scroll pinged back a second later. *Okay.*

*Bring a blanket too. The fleece one?* Yang added as an afterthought. She could almost see Blake's head tilt questioningly with a ear half flat and the other raised at her mysterious message.

*Okay,* her partner messaged again, seemingly unruffled, *I'll be there soon.*

Yang's footsteps ceased a step from her sister.

"What time is it?" Ruby asked quietly.

"Late enough that we started looking for both of you." She kept her voice just as low, putting the scroll back into her pocket.

Lilac eyes ran over them again, noting both their attires. But it was remembering Myrtenaster left carelessly on the floor that drew her gaze completely to Weiss, and the slight furrow in white eyebrows.

Evidently not a peaceful rest.

"Did she wear herself out?" She didn't miss the fact that the smallest in size of them hadn't even stirred despite the quiet chatter; Weiss was generally a light sleeper.

"She woke up too early."

One blonde eyebrow rose. "How did you know?"

A faint flush rose on Ruby's cheeks.

...Ohoh?

Well, that explained the messy bed that was Weiss's. The white-haired woman generally made sure the bed was made before leaving the room in the morning, so it had been an odd discovery for Blake and Yang to see that earlier.

And her cute sister was currently glaring at her in discontentment, eyes daring her to say something
about it.

She huffed out an amused breath, before squatting; eyes still looking over Weiss carefully, checking for anything amiss and finding none, before turning to look at the other.

"Did she…?" was her quiet question.

Hands curled around Weiss’s stomach just a tiny bit more.

Ruby shook her head. "She's okay," was the quiet words. "Just exhausted."

Her sister's gaze turned back to the white-haired woman - and there was something like haunting sadness flickering in silver eyes, making Ruby look so much more older than she should be.

Not for the first time, Yang wanted to curse.

They shouldn't have to deal with this. It was unfair. They deserved so much better.

Her sister was all too willing to help whenever someone needed help, and Weiss… Weiss may not seem like it, but years spent together had taught Yang that the white-haired woman was just as bad when it actually did count.

She didn't know which was worse, that Ruby could and would do it at all times, or that Weiss would do it just because she could, an effect made more devastating by the power she wielded, or that this was what they got back in return for all that they have done.

"And you?" Yang looked back at her sister again.

"I'm fine. Will be good as new by tomorrow."

Lilac eyes watched her carefully, watching for any signs that Ruby may be lying.

"Honest." Silver eyes were earnest now. "You don't have to worry about me, sis."

Her cute little sister had grown up, huh. Amused and wry, Yang reached over with a gloved hand and ruffled Ruby's hair instead.

"Y - Yang!"

A shadow loomed over them then, and Yang glanced up to meet concerned amber eyes belonging to her own partner, a blanket tucked underneath the arm.

Blake was frowning, taking in all three of them with a sharp, assessing gaze and pointed cat ears.

"How long were both of you here?" the faunus asked quietly, already fluffing loose the soft fleece as the length of it draped over the floor.

"I'm not sure when Weiss came in here," Ruby admitted. "I was here for two hours maybe?"

The older, black-haired teammate seemed to consider it for a moment before bending down - Yang moved back automatically to give space - and tucking the blanket around Weiss and Ruby.

"Thanks," the leader of team RWBY mumbled, sighing with faint relief. "It was getting a little cold."

"I can imagine," the dry response came, even as Blake's hand lifted to brush stray locks of white
hair away from Weiss's face gently. "It's fifteen degrees celsius outside, Ruby."

Much like Yang herself, the faunus was also searching for anything that may be amiss.

But finding nothing, the hand retracted.

"She's not going to be happy we're gathered around her like this," her partner commented.

In spite of that, Blake didn't seem inclined to leave either. Instead, she was moving to sit down, a hand pulling out a scroll from the pocket.

"Whatcha doing?" Yang asked, curious.

"Postponing her meeting."

"Won't she get mad?"

A careless shrug. "She thought he was annoying anyway."

Yang huffed out an amused breath before rolling back on her feet, palms pressing to the floor to support herself as she relaxed too; settling down for what may be a long, quiet morning.

She stared at the ceiling.

In retrospect, it probably was a better idea to just carry Weiss back to the house, where it would be warm and cozy.

But then Ruby must have decided that it was too much of a risk or she would have done so already. The change of temperature, the cool wind, and even the trip back might just wake Weiss up, despite that their soft chatter had yet to do so.

"...Should I go grab some playing cards and food?" Yang asked as an afterthought. "And more blankets?"

"That sounds like a good idea."

"Yeaaaah."

Despite herself, a fond smile quirked up.

And that was that.

...\n
A/N - Seems like there were a couple of you who might have been confused about the flow in part 5. I'll be looking into seeing how I can improve them soon. :( 

Other than that...I hope this chapter was a good read. Writing from Yang's POV had proved to be a little difficult, mostly because I'm not very good at writing outspoken characters (I'm an introvert). Hopefully I did her justice?

Thanks for reading!
Part 7 | and then | 3, 654 words
Post-Season 2. There will be spoilers to some degree.

... 

*Two months before graduation.*

In the darkness of the night, the scroll glowed in Weiss's hand. She continued to tap at it for a few moments longer before flipping it shut - leaving only the moonlight to illuminate the roof.

The heiress looked up, nose cold from the autumn night, and memorised the midnight blue sky with its bright full moon and faintly glimmering stars.

Sighing, she leaned back against the bench, and spoke.

"How long are you going to stand there, Blake?"

A pause.

"You didn't look like you wanted to be disturbed."

The corner of her lips turned up into the beginnings of a smile.

"And yet here you are?" Dry words, but there was no heat in her rebuke.

She gestured at the empty spot on the bench, knowing that Blake was observing her without having to see it.

Soundlessly, her teammate hopped over and sat next to her.

In the distance, the trees rustled gently.

"Did I wake you?" she asked after a moment.

Under the ribbon, the cat-like ear twitched.

"I'm just sensitive to sound."

"Hmm."

Silence reigned. The faunus didn't seem inclined to say anything, but if Weiss were honest with herself, she couldn't quite say the same.

"Hey, Blake?"

"Hm?"

She watched the clouds slowly creep past the moon, muting the soft white glow that soaked into her skin.

Yet, it somehow made the stars all the brighter.

"Weiss?"
She did not respond, for a moment.

There were a few things that immediately came to mind that she thought to say, but found that she couldn't.

And would not.

Her eyes closed.

"You are all worrying over nothing, you know," she said instead.

She could just feel the twitch coming from her teammate.

After a pause, Blake leaned back with a resigned mumble. "Are we that obvious?"

The huff she gave was amused and arrogant, reminiscent of their earliest days together. "Please. Who am I? And how long have we known each other?"

"Fair point," admitted Blake. "You aren't really helping, though."

Despite herself, her lips quirked.

"I know."

Her silence over the matter had been deliberate.

After all, graduation was only a little less than two months away, and until then, she wanted to preserve what normality there was amongst her team. Because once they left this school...

"Hey, Blake?" Vaguely she realized that she was repeating herself, but, well, she supposed that it was fine.

"...Hm?"

"Will you reveal your ears once you graduate?"

Silence.

Then, a soft exhale.

"I don't know, Weiss. Maybe. Maybe not. It would..." Hesitation. "It depends."

"...I see."

With that, Weiss stood, and watched the air mist over again as she breathed.

She couldn't help but wonder how different she would have been if she hadn't come to Beacon. It was hard to imagine.

But it was also incredibly easy.

They certainly wouldn't be sitting side by side like they were right now, and Blake, in all likelihood, would have ended up being her worst enemy.

She was a Schnee, after all, and she had always been vindictive by nature. If she hadn't realized how badly she had been blinded by hatred...
Perhaps it was more accurate to say that Weiss would have been Blake's worst enemy instead of the other way around.

And the thought of it. If things had been different.

"...Let's go back," she said, eyes still on the sky, and breathed in the cool air. "Any longer, and our partners might wake up as well. We have an early start tomorrow, don't we, for the mission?"

Not exactly true, given that Yang was a bit of a heavy sleeper even if Ruby not so much. Their leader, however, might wake her sister up upon seeing that Weiss and Blake both were missing.

A nod. "We do."

She turned, her teammate by her side as they walked inside.

The abrupt difference in temperature was almost disconcerting. Where it had been chilly outside, the warmth from the heat spread throughout the campus heating system eased the tension lining her shoulders that she hadn't realized was there.

For a while, they continued to tread down the hallway in silence.

And once again, she was the one who broke it.

"...Blake."

"Yes?"

A pause.

"One day, you will be able to show your ears without fearing the backlash. This, I promise you."

At that, Blake stopped walking. Weiss didn't, eyes fixed on the path before her, even as she felt amber eyes at the back of her neck, piercing into the Schnee symbol prominently threaded into her bolero.

It was a long moment before her friend spoke again.

"...Okay."

The word was almost too soft to hear, a myriad of emotions lurking beneath it that Weiss did not care to dissect.

And with a few quick strides, Blake fell back in line with her again as they made their way to the dorm.

... 

*Present.*

"Blake? Blake. Blakey. Are you listening?"

Amber eyes blinked up at lilac eyes.

She blinked again, leaning back against the chair, finally processing who it was that stood in front of her desk with hands behind back.
Now, was that not an unusual pose? Usually, those hands would be on the hips. Hmm.

"Hello, Yang."

Said person studied her for a full five seconds before huffing in exasperation. "You weren't listening." Deadpan words.

Despite herself, a faint smile curled her lips. "No…?"

"Do that more often and I might think that Weiss is contagious again."

Really. Yang was saying it like their white-haired teammate had contracted a dangerous disease and needed to be quarantined (again). Amusement settled on Blake's features.

"…Yang, she's not sick."

"No, but she's a work-alcoholic." The blonde rolled a shoulder, cracking it to ease a muscle. "And she's always ignoring me. Kinda like someone just now, y'know?" were the sage words. "So if that's not contagious, I don't know what is. Con-ta-gious."

She had such a theatrical partner.

"Okay," Blake decided to humor her. "If you say so."

Yang smirked. "Of course I do. Now what are you doing?"

If she said it, it would probably reaffirm to Yang that Weiss was contagious. Perhaps very much so. But she said it anyway. "…Work."

Silence.

Lilac eyes narrowed at her. "Blake."

She tilted her head, faint smile curving. "Yes?"

The blonde glared for a moment longer, before heaving a big woebegone sigh. "The things I do for my partner."

And suddenly, Yang was holding up a brown paper bag with a familiar logo stamped on it, dangling it loosely in front of her.

…Oh no, she didn’t.

"Yang," Blake breathed in wonder. So that was what the other was hiding behind her back.

"Guess what's in it?" the smug question came.

She looked back into laughing lilac eyes dryly. "Do you really want to play twenty questions with me?" She held out a hand, a silent request for her partner to hand over the bag. "And how did you know I'm starving?"

"I have my spieeeeess." Yang sang, easily dropping it in her open hand. "Your favourite tuna sandwich from Mikah's the Second, brought to you by Yang's delivery!"

She opened the bag immediately - and lo and behold, the sandwich from heaven stared back at her.
"I love you," she breathed out appreciatively, already pulling it out to unwrap her lunch - or perhaps it was tea time by this hour? "Thank you, Yang."

For a moment, her partner looked like she was going to flush in embarrassment, with the familiar and awkward rubbing at the back of her head that was, quite frankly, cute - but instead another grin came up.

She bit into the food and chewed, immediately savouring the flavour and freshness of the sandwich. Mmmmm.

Yang huffed in amusement. "Figured you'd purr at that."

"I didn't have lunch yet," she defended distractedly, munching at her food.

"So I was told."

She paused. "Who told you?" It was odd - only a select few would know she had been holed up in her office the entire day.

"Guess."

"...Ruby?" But that didn't make sense, Ruby had peeked in to say hi but otherwise hadn't bothered her. Their leader couldn't have realized she hadn't eaten yet. Rather, if the youngest of them knew, Blake would have been dragged out in the name of food.

"Bzz-zt. Wrong. It was Weiss actually."

She blinked.

Yang flicked open her scroll, tapped at it, and turned the screen towards Blake.

At the bottom of the conversation thread between her partner and Weiss (mostly the blonde being enthusiastic while the other responded curtly), was one line.

If you are going to make a nuisance of yourself, go feed your partner instead.

Her eyebrows climbed.

"See, even Weiss, the work alcoholic, knows that you haven't eaten."

"How - " she stopped. She was supposed to have lunch with Weiss today, but she had backed out. It was usually the other way round that occurred, what with the incomparable amount of work that Weiss had.

It was probably also because Blake would enter the white-haired woman's office at least once a day (generally during lunch hour because she had to sometimes bully Weiss into eating), and that hadn't happened yet.

Her lips twitched.

She supposed this was revenge in return for all those times.

Blake licked at her thumb, having devoured the entire sandwich. Yang was still looking at her with an arched brow.

"I had to chase up on a few things," she confessed to her partner, "that ended up occupying my
The scroll slid back into Yang's pocket. "Figured." Then the sunny grin faded into a serious look. "And what are these things that made you lose track of time?"

Silence.

She hesitated. Should she explain?

"No more solo runs, Blakey. We are partners." Yang said, eyes crinkling with gentle humor.

Well, if that wasn't a nail in the coffin.

She sighed. "I haven't mentioned this to Weiss yet, but... one of my feelers sent me something. There -" she paused. "There might be another...sleeper agent."

Something like red flickered in lilac eyes.

"Who?" There was something very deadly in that quiet question.

Blake shook her head. "I don't know. One of the board members, possibly. We still need to determine if this is true or false."

She hadn't investigated far enough, but she was going to find out. At the very least, she needed to confirm if this was in any way related to Ruby getting grabbed just a little while ago. Was it really an isolated incident? Or did someone from SDC instigate it?

A spark of incensed rage burned in her at remembering that. It was a scene far too familiar, except this time Ruby wasn't poisoned and it had ended favorably for them.

But it could have gone the other way so. Easily.

The incident that changed all their lives. The one that culminated in Blake replacing the former head of security - one who had been responsible for leading Weiss into a death trap.

Weiss had too many enemies. Or perhaps it was more accurate to say that they didn't know who were her real allies. With each passing day, the confirmed list grew, but...it was too slow. Too, too slow.

She needed to be faster.

Wasn't this why she took on this role?

She still clearly remembered the conversation she'd had with the white-haired woman, the conversation that made her choose to forego her freedom as a huntress to help Weiss. For a moment, all noise faded into the background as the memory took over.

The sky, a clear bright blue.

Weiss was sitting up on the bed, propped against the pillows - she should be resting, a small part of her mind chastised - looking out the window, bandages all over her, as silent as death.

The scent of antiseptic and blood lingered in the air, thicker still at where Blake stood, next to the bed.

She had no idea if the smaller woman had even registered anything she said.
But perhaps Weiss just no longer wanted to hear her.

She was a faunus, after all, and after everything that happened to her - after everything that the White Fang did... Why would Weiss still even consider her a teammate, let alone a friend? And Adam. *Adam.* He caused *all of this.*

Something clenched in her.

"If - " she took in a deep breath; looked down at her feet. "If you don't want me around anymore, I'll go. I will, Weiss, so please..."

On the bed, the white-haired woman seemed to stiffen almost imperceptibly.

No response came however, and she took it as agreement.

She forced herself to nod. "Okay. I'll leave. I'm...I'm sorry this happened. I'm so sorry, Weiss. Please...get better soon. Yang and Ruby are worried, you know. They might just go insane if something happened to you again and - and - take care. Okay?"

She took a shaky step back only to freeze.

A cool hand had grasped her own, the bandages wrapped around it pressing against her skin.

Blue eyes, burning and intense with unidentifiable emotions, were fixed on her.

"Don't be a fool."

Quiet, quiet words.

The grip on her hand tightened.

"You seem to think that I am capable of dealing with that pair of infuriating siblings alone without blowing a fuse." Weiss was speaking calmly, and with such peevish strength that it made her heart soar. "Let me tell you now, you idiot. The answer is *no.*"

Her mouth opened in automatic protest.

"But the White Fang - "

Blue eyes narrowed at her.

"Would you have done the things they did to me?"

Ice filled her veins. The very thought of that made her want to recoil.

"No!" She tensed. "Never. Not even if I was still in it! You've to believe me - I would never - "

"Then stop talking."

Her mouth snapped shut.

Only the soft wind from the open window disturbed the silence between them.

Her hand was released, and the other turned to look out the window again, leaning back against the pillows. There was a sort of bone-deep weariness permeating that slender frame, and it scared her deeply.
If Weiss went to sleep, would she want to wake up?

Blake didn't know the answer to that.

"I have already lost a family, Blake." The soft, calm words jerked her out of her thoughts. "So don't make me lose another. Alright?"

She stared at the back of Weiss's head, at the long white hair moving gently with the wind. On the bed, covered in bandages and dressed simply in loose white clothes, her teammate had never looked so small.

So frail.

Weiss was never meant to look like this.

Blake's vision blurred, feeling something hot and wet prickling at her eyes.

But somehow, she managed to speak despite the hard, invisible lump that formed at the back of her throat.

"...Okay."

A momentary pause.

"Good."

There and then, she swore it wouldn't happen again. She wouldn't let it. Ever. If White Fang wanted to get their hands on Weiss - or Yang or Ruby - they would have to step over her dead body, and she wouldn't go without a fight. She wouldn't.

"- Hellooo? Blake, you're zoning out again."

The faunus blinked up at lilac eyes that were much closer than they were earlier.

When did Yang move around the table to her side? She was leaning back against the desk with arms folded across chest… and for all appearances seemed to have watched her as she was pulled into her memories.

Crap.

"Sorry." She shook her head. "I was just thinking."

"About?" Yang leaned close, peering at her with a perceptive gaze.

It was another moment before she answered. "Just...memories."

Something like understanding flickered in lilac eyes.

She lifted a hand to grasp Yang by the wrist, pulling the blonde closer.

"You okay?" came a soft murmur, warm breath against her cheek. There was a scent of something very comforting - like wild flowers and the sun - coming from her partner, and it made a tense knot in her shoulders uncoil.

Blake managed a smile. "Yeah. I am."
She closed the last of the distance between them, feeling a half-gloved hand curling against her neck and face, calloused fingers warm and gentle on her skin.

Her partner would eventually pry the details of the looming threats out of her, and Blake would give them, however reluctantly - but they could talk about sleeper agents and potential danger later.

She threaded her own hand into a mass of soft yellow curls.

Right now, she just wanted Yang.

... 

So many regrets.

So many what-ifs.

And so much guilt.

These were what haunted her sister and partner.

"Did you feed her?" Weiss asked without looking up, still scanning the papers in her hands. She was seated on one of the sofas in the corner of her vast office with legs crossed demurely - apparently having vacated her large table in favor of the comfy seat.

What haunted the white-haired woman was something else altogether.

But then, did it really matter?

All Yang really saw was a team - her team - who had been hurt so deeply, and had only just begun recovering.

She scratched at the back of her head before deciding to plop down on the empty seat diagonal to Weiss, stretching comfortably on it. Briefly, she considered lifting her feet to rest on the table, but that would probably make the other blow a fuse.

"I did. Thanks for that, by the way."

A brief nod from the other. "Good. Now what do you want?"

Her eyebrows raised in bemusement. "What I want?"

Something like a grimace pinched the president's expression, and blue eyes turned up to look at her with annoyance. "Yang, you've been coming up here every day. Every. Single. Day."

"Can't I just come have a chat with my partner and sister-in-law?" Yang asked. "Besides, Ruby does it too." When she wasn't on a mission, at least. And even when Ruby did have a mission, they no longer lasted more than a day or two - or even took her beyond Atlas grounds. A far cry from what she used to do.

But then all that came to a halt anyway after the damned White Fang snatched her sister and scared the shit out of Yang. If Blake hadn't told her to stay at home and calm the rage that boiled in her...

Mist blue eyes were narrowing at her. "We are not a pair of toddlers that need to be taken care of, Yang. Besides, are you not busy with your own work?"

Leaning against the chair, Yang looked up at the ceilings to count the cracks. Or lack thereof. "I'm
taking a break. Benefits of being a freelance hunter, y'know?"

Besides, she had been entertaining the idea of opening a bar. A central point where she could collect information easily might prove to be useful… perhaps it was time to look into that a little more.

"By the way," she said after a moment, "do I need to feed you too?" Yang didn't think she had to - but it never hurt to double check. They were both crazily obsessed with work. She'd never understand why.

Speaking of work, was running a bar even really worth her time? The blonde certainly had no intention to turn into a work alcoholic like a certain duo. Hmm.

A faint scowl settled on Weiss's features. "No," came the cross words, "I have eaten. I just wasn't sure if Blake had."

Yang hummed.

For a short while, neither said anything, Weiss still looking at her suspiciously. But when the blonde didn't say anything, blue eyes turned to focus on the papers in hand instead.

Yang switched from counting cracks to counting tiles, hands curling behind her head.

She wondered if she should ask. The last thing she wanted was to evoke bad memories, but Weiss was the one who made her promise to do this. Made her promise that, on the first sign of regression, she'd make sure that Weiss wouldn't get the chance to harm anyone.

Prevention, Weiss's words echoed in her mind like a cold brand. Failing that, damage control. Those blue eyes had never looked so calm, so unreadable, and it had made her want to shake the other so hard.

Yang had watched long enough to be almost sure everything was okay, but wasn't a hundred percent certain. The blonde couldn't exactly monitor the situation twenty four hours a day, after all.

Damned if she asked, damned if she didn't.

But she had promised.

"...Any relapse since that morning Ruby found you in the training hall?" she asked.

She peered at the white-haired woman from the corner of her eyes, for all intents and purposes seemingly still studying the ceiling.

Mist blue eyes had not wavered from the report she was reading, but her grip on the papers had tightened.

Silence.

And then the answer came, the tension in those fingers uncoiling at the same time.

"No."

Yang hummed again, eyes turning back to the ceiling.

Neither spoke for a while.
Then she reached for the handle to recline her chair backwards, moving a little to position herself more comfortably. "I'm going to take a nap now. Wake me up when you and Blake are ready to head back?"

Weiss huffed. "You could sleep in Blake's office."

"The comfy chairs are in your ridiculously big office, Weiss."

An exasperated sigh tinged with frustration. "If you start snoring, I'll kick you out of my office."

"Aww, but you love me too much for that, ice queen~"

"I will kick you out right now if you don't shut up."

... 

A/N - This is so late. I'm sorry about that. Too many things going on in the last couple weeks - ranging from me discovering Clexa (I totally blame that one person who should not have introduced me to new OTPs), resigning from a job, work cleanup, et cetera.

It was probably time to show a little bit of Bumblebee, I think, considering the tags I have for this fic. I hope it delivers like I wanted it to. Next chapter might prove to deliver for those keen on White Rose… But anyway! Thank you all for the kind reviews - I apologize for not having been able to respond personally during this period.

Feedback, as usual, are always much appreciated. Thanks for reading!
Ruby started asking to kiss her a lot more… and Weiss didn't know how to say no.

Judging by the number of times the request came up, one of these days her partner was going to do it as freely as the hugs were given and not bother with permission anymore.

Her back pressed against the seat; Ruby hovered above her.

Today, there was a strange kind of ferocity in the way Ruby had slanted her lips over Weiss's, some kind of aggressiveness in it that she didn't quite understand - only that it was sudden. And possessive.

Nevermind that she still didn't quite grasp what all of this meant, despite that it would be just a few more weeks before they would be married. This… this thing between them, Ruby kissing her, was something that had been happening with increasing frequency, fervor - and her resistance to it caved a little more with each time.

But it was all still too recent, too fast, too consuming.

"St - " Weiss bit down a gasp when those lips pressed against her jaw line, branding imprints of heat and moisture into her skin that sent a shiver down her spine. This was new, too, in Ruby's wandering explorations of her. First had been the kisses, the touches and now - now this.

And explorations? Was she really terming it explorations??!

It was also entirely too much for her buzzing nerves.

She grasped Ruby's shoulder with a hand, and forced some distance between them - as much as humanly possible anyway without tipping them over, since the other was sitting on her lap. "Stop. Stop."

Then she proceeded to remove the hands - one that was caressing her neck and the other scratching at the underside of her ear - holding the wrists far and away from anywhere near her as she pressed them against the armrests instead.

It had felt very nice, Ruby's fingers just touching her so, but it was also doing very well at breaking her focus. And she needed to be able to think.

"Ruby - " the burning intensity in those silver eyes was making her heart pound, and she dragged in a deep breath. "What - what are we doing?"

Dark eyebrows arched up. "Kissing?"

The little monster. Weiss could have strangled her.
"We need to talk about this," she said instead.

Ruby seemed to consider it for a moment, but the returning response was dry if not plaintive. "Weiss, I'm not sure I know how to talk about kissing."

She really wanted to wring her neck. "That's not what I mean and you know th - " she cut herself off.

Ruby was leaning in again, nuzzling against her face. Where the hands had been locked in place on the armrests, the mouth clearly wasn't.

She took in a quick breath, looked away in an attempt to concentrate. "Ruby - that's not - we need to talk."

That probably wasn't the best course of action, baring her neck to the other. Ruby may have made a noise of agreement, but the younger woman was also tracing a line on her skin with the lips, nipping and scraping at it, making her eyes squeeze shut as she gritted her teeth at the sensation of a hot mouth against the vein.

And if Ruby kept doing that, Weiss was going to let her do whatever she wanted. Forcing herself to focus, she lifted a hand from where it was gripping one of Ruby's wrists and pulled hard enough at dark locks of hair until that wicked mouth was no longer on her skin.

Their eyes met, and those gunmetal eyes were smoldering with an intensity that made her want to swallow. It was a possessive gaze directed at her.

Weiss was used to being wanted by people, and had long since learnt how to recognize the signs and deal with them accordingly - but Ruby was a completely different matter, because the little lunatic was important to her, and she didn't know if she even wanted to stop it.

It was still all too confusing.

To make matters worse, they were going to marry soon. And there were only so many uncertainties she could deal with before they made her blow a fuse.

"This," she forced herself to say, voice rough and low, "is not talking."

Ruby, she thought with no amount of small frustration, had the gall to pout at her like a child whose toy was being taken away.

Her partner was not allowed to look like that, not when she had been giving in to Ruby's requests all these times, culminating in that - the - that whatever thing the other had been doing to her. Screw dealing with her confusion over the entire thing hanging over them right now, this took precedence.

"What's gotten into you today?" Weiss asked with another dragging breath, feeling more than a little warm and exasperated. She could still feel the imprint of warmth on her neck that was like a brand. "You are being... you are weird, today."

For a moment, her partner looked sorely tempted to ignore her words and lean in again; she tightened the grip she had on the black hair as a silent warning.

And thankfully, the younger woman was obedient this time. Weiss had no idea what she was going to do if Ruby started kissing her again.
The younger huntress placed a little more distance between them - it made her want to sigh in relief - and then Ruby tilted her head questioningly even as Weiss released her hair carefully, wary of any sudden movements.

"I was weird?"

"Yes!" she couldn't help but snap. "You are - just - you're being very… " she paused awkwardly, cheeks flushed. "Aggressive. Today. More so than you usually are." They had a usual?

Ruby's nose twitched. "Really…?"

A sudden suspicion licked at her.

"You were," Weiss said carefully. "Mind telling me what brought this on?" Because, really, what could have caused this...this sudden show of possessiveness? It came out of nowhere, quite literally.

All that happened today was her being stuck in meetings - a long, tiring one with her board, Ruby dropping by from whatever shenanigans she was up to, followed by another meeting with Hope Estheim, the director of the Science Division XIII... who was also a former suitor.

Hope was a good man with a kind heart, if a little naive. They had also known each other for years, long before she went to Beacon. His family was almost as influential as her own.

More importantly, he understood the delicate positions they held. He wasn't opposed to faunus. He personally had his own altercations with White Fang, even if not by choice, and was resourceful enough to overcome them with a few others who got involved inadvertently as well.

It was an event that had gone quite public, and to the point where it had even come to her attention.

But summarily?

He was tolerable.

And a part of her did think she could potentially live with him because of that. Especially because of that.

But that didn't make sense, did it?

It wasn't as if her partner had seen him before, much less known he could have become her intended if Ruby hadn't stepped in. Even if he was at the top of her list.

...Wait.

Something clicked in Weiss's mind.

When Hope arrived for the conference, Blake had taken up the task of pulling Ruby out of the office so the meeting could start. The faunus was also whispering something to Ruby during the process, with amber eyes that gleamed with undisguised mischief.

And when Ruby's head had whipped around to stare at her ex-suitor just as the door was closing…

No. Really…? It couldn't be, could it?

Blake, the little miscreant. Weiss was going to kill her.
It didn't take a genius to put two and two together, and while she was humble enough to not call herself a certified genius, that didn't mean she wasn't one.

Her partner's sheepish gaze was trained away from her own's piercing eyes.

Suddenly, Weiss felt an insane urge to laugh wildly.

"Are you - " she paused, still half in disbelief. "Are you jealous?"

"No," was the denial, cheeks red and puffing out in that adorable way that always made Weiss torn between wanting to spoil her and strangle her.

...Oh god. She was jealous.

"Ruby," a startled laugh escaped her. "Really? That's where this is coming from?"

Predictably, her partner degenerated into a sulk, arms crossing.

She huffed. So that was where the sudden...possessiveness came from. It was flattering - and also bewildering - that Ruby would feel that way, but also a little insulting. What did she take her for? Someone who would merrily skip off to have an affair with a cheesy sunset as the background?

Ugh. The very thought.

"You realize," Weiss begun dryly, "that the person I'll be married to is you and not him, Ruby?"

Sullen silence greeted her, so she reached up, cupped Ruby's face with both hands, and angled it to face her properly.

Amused and peeved blue met sulky silver.

"I would appreciate it," her voice was still very bone-dry with just the tiniest hint of humor, "if you would not offend me by thinking I would have an affair - especially once I make my vows and be yours in name."

Something flickered in Ruby's gaze.

"Mine?" was the quiet question.

There was something in the way Ruby said that which made her feel as if she was in the presence of a predator.

"I - " she stopped, drawing in another breath, and released Ruby's face. They were already moving to the thing hanging over them that had been confusing her terribly? How did they go from the topic of jealousy to this in an instant?

Ruby's full attention was evidently on her now, making her that much more aware of the infuriating person seated on her lap. It sent a rush of heat and irritance through her blood.

"Yes," she said with no small amount of frustration lining her words, drumming her tense fingers against the armrest. "Yours. In name."

Just? Or more?

Weiss honestly didn't know the answer to that any more. Before, she was certain it would have been a blank marriage.
Her plan had been simple.

Let Ruby do what she wanted, because when the other was determined to do something, not even Weiss was capable of stopping her. No, better to just let her roll with it. In two years time, the president would've held up her end of the agreement, she could put an end to this foolishness, and not even Ruby could argue against that.

But things had become so much more complicated now, with the foray into this new, uncertain, and strange territory.

The younger woman blew into the air, causing black strands of hair to fly. Those cheeks were still flushed from what they were doing. That was quite pleasing to see - not just because she had been the one to cause it, but also because it was wildly attractive.

It wasn't that Ruby wasn't pretty either. She always had been. But just. Especially so.

And where the silver eyes had something like possessiveness in them earlier, now, there was something like exasperation mingling with it.

"I'm not so sure if - " Ruby paused, "if the marriage will be as we originally, ehm, agreed it would be. As in, anymore, Weiss."

...So. It appeared that her partner had been thinking about the same thing. But did she really need to state the obvious and make her want to blush furiously?

"I like kissing you." The very frank words came. "I also like touching you. And I don't want to stop."

The honest admittance sent a rush of heat up Weiss's neck.

"I - " she hesitated.

And then Ruby was leaning in close again, and this time, before she could react - hands had pressed over the back of her palms, and locked them down to the armrests in a reverse of situation.

Weiss's attempt at jerking her hands back was rebuffed by her partner's firm grip.

"Ruby - "

"Sometimes," her partner's voice was dry, amused, and very close, "you make things more complicated than they should be."

Weiss had to force herself to remain still. "What are you talking about?"

"No?" There was something infinitely fond and affectionate in Ruby's soft voice. "I think we are fine as we are. You matter to me, Weiss, not the marriage," were the very light and very earnest words.

She tensed.

"We can just go at our pace, can't we?" Fingers were curling around her palms gently. "It's that simple."

But was it really?

*That* simple?
"I - " her mouth closed. Opened. Closed again.

She felt something coil tightly in her.

"You can't tell me you don't want this," Ruby said pointedly, calmly, for once unwilling to let her hide away behind her walls again. "You wouldn't kiss me back if you don't. So how about telling me why this is bothering you instead?"

Piercing gunmetal eyes was peering right into her soul. Now, she looked more like her team leader than her… lover? Best friend with benefits? Someone she kissed?

But no, those terms didn't do Ruby justice. Her partner had become far too important to her to be labeled that.

Did she love her partner the way her father had loved her mother? Dare she?

If someone asked her that question a few years ago, when she was seventeen and Ruby fifteen, the answer would have been a firm no.

Now…

Weiss dragged in a deep breath.

This conversation was going into a direction she didn't want it to go at all.

"I just - " she stopped.

Ruby was watching her, patient and expectant, hands warm against her own. Her stupidly earnest gaze demanded honesty.

She couldn't lie.

"I'm not right for you," Weiss said at last, suddenly exhausted.

There was no outburst like she expected, no loud protest, no fervent disagreement. Instead, Ruby leaned in, and touched their foreheads together.

"Why do you think so?" was the quiet question.

Sometimes, she thought, Ruby could be very cruel. She also wondered if her partner realized that. But then again she wasn't sure she wanted to know if the other did know.

There were so many responses she had for that, ranging from the danger of being with her, to the part where she had so much hanging on her shoulders, to the part where Ruby should be free, not locked down to her, and really.

It was that her partner simply deserved better.

But in the end, she settled for the answer that mattered the most, because Weiss simply couldn't lie when face to face with the expression that Ruby had.

"You know I'm broken," she wasn't sure if her voice cracked. She hoped it hadn't. "I've been broken for a long time."

Memories washed over her again.
The cold, mocking voice of the man who poisoned her partner, never too far, always too close, watching, watching.

The Grimm masks, glinting red.

The cries of her sister.

The way they tried to cripple her left hand in the most painful way possible. First the pinprick needles, then the hammer, then the sickening squelch - and always with just enough time in between to minimally mend her broken, shattered arm.

And then it would stop being numb and become so raw with agonizing pain.

Amputation was too easy, he had said. A far more instantaneous pain than what they were doing to her. The goal wasn't for her to bleed out so soon, after all.

The goal was to break her and then turn her into a puppet that would do everything they wanted.

And how close they had been.

She forced down a tremble at the memory of his cold voice, feeling a ghostly pain traveling down her arm.

Her eyes shut.

"Weiss. Weiss." Gentle hands had moved to cup her face. "Look at me."

She forced herself to focus on silver eyes that searched her own, intense, sad, determined and yet sodamnably earnest that she couldn't bear to continue letting them pierce into her anymore.

She attempted to push Ruby's hands away. But the grip that her partner had on her was firm.

"Let go -"

"Nope." If anything, the other just angled her face up a little more. There was a wry, sad note in Ruby's soft voice. "Weiss, you can be so silly sometimes."

"What are you -"

Without warning, Ruby's mouth slanted across hers.

She couldn't help the startled sound that came out, hands gripping at sleeves tightly.

This kiss was rough, claiming, swallowing all her shaky protests, tongue invading and giving no quarter.

A part of her knew what her partner was trying to do. But the kiss was harsh and it almost made her bit at the other's lip - then again, she was already tasting blood, so maybe she had.

And perhaps it was working. It was hard to think when Ruby took with such intensity, and when Weiss was already fighting to control the emotions that threatened to rage within her.

So really, what else could she do but give in?

Then it was over.
Her forehead was pressed against a shoulder, she was heaving in fast, shallow breaths, her heart was pounding so hard - and there was a warm hand curled around the back of her neck, holding her there.

Weiss could still taste some blood - hers or Ruby's?

"I don't think you are broken," Ruby was murmuring into her hair, soft and gentle but firm. "And even if you are, do you really think I care about that, Weiss?"

No, she thought with some weariness, she supposed not.

But Ruby really should care about it.

"Besides," the person holding her went on to say, "if we want to talk about this philosophically, everyone is a little broken. No one can claim otherwise. So if everyone's broken, that means everyone's not broken. No?"

What?

She wanted to bark out an incredulous laugh at that. "Ruby," her voice was wry and drained. "That's not logical."

"I kinda think it is. Doesn't it make sense?"

...It actually did, in some strange, absurd way that Weiss didn't care to try deciphering right now. But she wasn't going to tell her partner that.

She sighed instead, much too tired to even lift her head off Ruby's shoulder, even if her breathing had evened. Plus that hand on her neck. "Are you trying to make some kind of point here?"

"Well… " Ruby trailed off for a moment. "Yeah."

"What?"

"My point is… just let me love you. Okay?"

Silence.

Her hands curled into fists.

"Ruby." Did her voice crack? She hoped it didn't, much like how she tried to will the hotness around her eyes away as if it wasn't there. "You are an idiot."

The younger woman made an amused sound of some sort into her hair. "If you say so, Weiss."

...  

A/N - I've had this done for months, but I never got around to posting it because of some dilemma I had about the next chapter.. and then I got distracted by other shiny things. And, well. I can't quite remember what stopped me from posting this anymore. And I suck at taking proper notes. And it will probably come back and bite me in the ass later.

Okay, that's too many Ands. Uhm. I'll at least hope this chapter will wash away all the frustrations at my lack of updates...?

In addition, with regards to season 3 of RWBY - I haven't gotten around to actually watching it, but
chances are this fic may no longer be considered a canonical future possibility with whatever's new in season 3. We will see though - I plan on watching it soon.

Thank you for reading!

Chapter End Notes

Edit (09/02): This is a little late, but I need to ask. I'm in need of a beta, especially where grammar and tenses are concerned. Drop me a note if you don't mind giving me a hand - it will be much appreciated.
Last mission before graduation.

As a Grimm slammed a paw into her raised gauntlets, Yang grinned. On the grass beneath her, a glyph that was uniquely Weiss Schnee's was glowing a bright, burnt yellow - a testament to how much Weiss understood how her team fought by now.

Curling her fist tight, Yang crunched it into the jaw of the grimm in front of her with speed she would not have without the glyph, simultaneously letting loose a dust bullet that tossed the monster far into the forest.

The sound of steel cutting through air reached her ears, a thump, light movement in the air - and then Weiss was landing gracefully beside her.

"That's the last of it," was the heiress's cool response, hardly even out of breath where she would have been three years ago.

"Good," Ember Celica clicked and closed back around her wrist and forearm. "Let's get to the rendezvous point. They should be about done as well."

There was the faintest hint of agitation in Yang's voice - and Weiss could understand why. After all, splitting up had not been part of the plan, and yet somehow they had ended up separated.

It was a good thing that Ruby had determined a muster point.

Giving the briefest of a nod to Yang, Weiss sheathed her rapier, and looked up.

Overhead, past the tall trees and thickets of red leaves, the sun was bright and sharp; the blue sky clear and wide.

"It should be east from where we are," Yang said, tapping at her scroll to double check their location. "A fifteen minute walk."

Another nod, and Weiss stepped up to her taller teammate, hand resting on Myrtenaster.

The trek up the hill begun at a sedate pace with Yang taking point.

Silence reigned for a grand total of thirteen seconds before Yang predictably broke it.

"Hey, ice queen?"

"Don't call me that," she said automatically.

Yang grinned. "But it fits."

"Don't even start," she warned without heat, mostly resigned and just a little bit exasperated. "I will
ignore you."

The best way to stop the other, she had long since learnt, was to shut down any and all advances before they started. Because once they did, there would be no stopping them - especially since Yang always had a way to get under her skin.

The blonde knew that too, apparently, and visibly deflated. "Why are you such a buzzkill?"

"We are in the middle of a Grimm-infested forest with our partners nowhere in sight." Sarcasm. "How about you tell me why?"

"Not exactly our first time to be a part of something like this, Weiss. We have been part of more dangerous situations before."

"Forced to be a part of. Forced."

Lilac eyes went sideways to observe her. "You are touchy today."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not. You just have too much energy right now." Then, to herself, she grumbled, "How Blake puts up with that energy of yours, I'll never know."

"Did you say something?" Yang asked suspiciously.

"No."

"...I think you did. You should tell me before I give you a noogie."

Her eyes flashed dangerously. "I'd like to see you try."

For a few seconds, Yang looked sorely tempted to.

But in the end, all her teammate did was sigh.

"Weiss?"

"What?"

"You should tell me if something or someone needs punching, you know."

She blinked, stopped in her tracks, and turned to look back at lilac eyes.

"What?" she asked again, caught off-guard.

Yang responded by poking her near the eyebrow.

"This."

She backed away from the finger, lifting her own hand to rub at where she was poked. "What are you -"

"Weiss, you may be an ice queen, but not even your brows furrow that way that often."

She just blinked up at Yang, puzzled.

The blonde rolled her eyes.

This time, Yang pushed Weiss's hand away, and pressed her own calloused thumb against a white
brow, massaging gently.

Stupefied as Weiss was, the heiress could only stare at the sudden touch.

"You have had this expression since you came back from Atlas," Yang explained. "The type that makes me want to punch whoever put that look on your face."

Oh. *Oh.*

"I - " Weiss cut herself off, backed away from the warm touch, and turned away.

Why was this pair of siblings always so infuriatingly direct?

She shook her head, looked back at the other, and forced herself to work out a response. "I'm fine," she said, "You are just overthinking it."

A blonde brow lifted. "Overthinking? *Me?*

The irony was not lost on Weiss, and her lips twitched.

Then the white-haired woman sighed, and she nodded. "You are, this time. But...thank you."

Despite herself, she smiled. "For your concern."

Yang responded by dragging the heiress to her with a tight one-armed hug with one of the biggest grin she had ever seen.

"Anytime, Ice Queen."

She yelped in surprise, breath cut short, "Y - Yang! Let go!"

Yang squeezed just a bit more tightly, and released her.

Weiss straightened and huffed. "W-we should go," she pointed at the path before them, as if her feathers had not been ruffled just moments ago or that her cheeks weren't warm to touch.

"Uh huh." Yang was still grinning. It made her want to jab her rapier into the blonde's side.

They resumed their walk in silence, and the heiress was left to mull over her thoughts quietly.

And right now, it was focused on the person walking by her side.

Despite how reckless Yang could be, she was a lot more observant than most people give her credit for. Not that the blonde actually tried to persuade them of it - there was a certain edge that she gained from that.

She could also be tactful when she wanted to be. It was usually a matter of choosing whether she wanted to be tactful, or whether she wanted her fists to do the talking.

Unless if it involved her hair, then her fists would do the talking without a doubt.

Weiss couldn't quite stop the amused huff that came out of her at that thought, a sound that earned her a curious look from Yang.

"Want to fill me in on what's so funny?"

She shook her head. "No."
"Why?"

"Because, Yang."

Lilac eyes squinted at her. "Fine. Be that way, stingy."

Weiss just rolled her eyes, and brief silence reigned.

Only to be broken by Yang once more.

"Soooo…. does anything or anyone need punching?"

Weiss honestly couldn't help it.

She snorted.

Then something in the bushes rustled.

Both of them fell silent.

Yang cracked her knuckles. "What was the tally again?"

"41 to 39." Her hand settled to rest against the pommel of myrtenaster. Something undeniably smug grew in her tone. "In my favour, of course." Weiss turned to face the other way, angling herself until they were back to back.

The blonde clicked her tongue irritably, something white-gold flaring in her hair. "Time to catch up."

Weiss smirked, unsheathing her rapier. "You can try."

Yang rolled her eyes. "Just watch me, princess."

"Hmph."

Around them, ominous red eyes glowed from within the thick thicket of bushes and trees.

. . .

Present.

Ruby's silver eyes tracked her sister's movements from where she sat; her chin rested against the backrest of the chair. It was probably a good thing Weiss wasn't around to see that - she would have been in for a earful with the unladylike behavior otherwise.

It was another pause before she spoke, if a little warily.

"...How did you go from thinking about opening a bar to a private investigation company again?"

Yang was still inspecting the dusty premise with a hand cocked on the hip as she walked around, but the head had tilted slightly at Ruby's question.

"I haven't actually decided," was the distracted response. "I might do both - could be useful. Wanna join me, sis?"

The younger woman leaned further against the chair, and begun to loll sideways as her left cheek touched the wood.
"Why PI?" Ruby wondered aloud.

"Well, I tracked you down, didn't I?"

Ruby winced. She still remembered the headlock and noogie that her sister gave her the moment they met. "That reminds me. How did you...?"

Yang turned to face her, hands crossed. "Sometimes," the blonde drawled with a smirk, "it pays to be an awesome tracker."

The younger woman suppressed a sigh.

That Yang managed to find Ruby was a testament to her abilities, and how she'd never get lost in the thickest of the woods.

Blake may weave her way around forests like she had been born there, but Yang more than made up for it by intuition and skills - some gleaned from their uncle, some from Blake, and the rest of it pure talent and determination.

It was something that had saved her team more than once. It was Yang who pieced together every hint that eventually lead them to Weiss, and Ruby could never be more grateful for that.

Yet, despite that, Ruby couldn't help but wonder what drove her sister to hone these abilities to such extent.

Briefly - very briefly - something flashed in her mind. Of trembling hands that curled around her small frame, young lilac eyes that were desperate and fearful -

And then it was gone.

It was so faint, the memory, that it felt more like a vague dream that made no sense.

She had never seen her sister that afraid, after all.

" - Ruby?"

She blinked. "Huh?"

Yang stared at her in bemusement, lips tugging up with wry humor. "They infected you."

She blinked again. "Infected - wha?"

Yang sighed, waving a hand. "Nevermind."

Ruby squinted suspicious eyes at her sister, but didn't comment. "You haven't told me how you tracked me yet, Yang," she reminded instead.

The blonde squinted back at her. "You haven't told me why you decided to suddenly marry Weiss either."

She froze, and swallowed nervously. "Uh. W-what do you mean?"

With hands crossed, Yang just stared back expectantly, eyes piercing.

A lump formed in her throat.
Two heartbeats later, when Ruby couldn't bring herself to say anything, Yang sighed. "Ruby."

The disappointment in her sister's quiet voice made her want to flinch.

"You know," the older of them huffed, "when I told you to haul ass back to Atlas and talk to Weiss, I didn't actually expect a marriage to come out of it."

Ruby rubbed at the back of her head, grinning sheepishly. "Eh…"

"You didn't really think Blake and I believe that you two had been seeing each other when you had been away for so long, did you?" Dry, blunt words. "You are terrible at lying, and Weiss is terrible at it where you are concerned."

Ruby winced. In retrospect, it was probably a really, really terrible lie.

Actually, what the hell. It was a terrible lie - the worst lie she made, actually - especially since Blake definitely knew about the suitors. And when Ruby came back and all of a sudden they decided to get married…

Ruby hesitated. Nervous energy thrummed in her blood as she chewed on her lip. "Why didn't you say anything?" she couldn't help but blurt out. "And you played along!"

Now, her sister rolled her eyes to the ceiling. "I played along because I thought you or Weiss would explain." A pause. "It never happened, obviously, even if Blake and I more or less figured out why you were doing it."

There was that hint of disapproval in Yang's otherwise casual tone again that made her want to squirm, but the blonde continued before Ruby could react. "And when you two got…" - a split second silence - "...closer, we decided to see what will happen instead."

She flushed. Closer. Weiss and her had gotten closer. A lot more than she thought possible. A lot more than she had ever imagined.

And suddenly Yang was snapping her fingers in front of her face. "Focus, sis. You can think about kissing her later."

Ruby jerked in surprise, the chair she was on teetering backwards - and she would've fallen with a yelp if Yang hadn't grabbed it and steadied the furniture. "Y-Yang!"Her face felt very hot. "I wasn't - "

The blonde gave her a sly smirk. "If you think you had been discreet, Ruby, think again."

She felt like her face was in flames. She wanted to flail her arms. Most of all, she wanted to hide under the chair she was on.

Instead, she swallowed and chewed at her lip nervously again. "So… you knew we weren't...? Until recently?"

Yang rolled her eyes. "As if I don't know you two, sis. Weiss wasn't happy you sprung this marriage on her, was she?"

A beat of silence.

"No," Ruby admitted quietly, even as her mind raced back to that moment. Seeing how Weiss had reacted was the primary reason why she hesitated on telling Yang and Blake. She knew it was a
wild and crazy idea to begin with, and it took all she had to make Weiss agree with it.

While her sister knew that Ruby could handle herself, but the fact was that she was Yang's baby sister - and that meant the blonde wouldn't have reacted well. Weiss alone, she could convince, but Weiss and Yang combined?

When Yang and Weiss did actually agree on something (rare as that might be), it was very difficult to sway them.

And, there was absolutely no way she would have let Weiss proceed with her original plan of playing a damned martyr. It was a thought that still irked her, the way Weiss so easily put herself up for the board.

Like how Weiss did that time when that bastard poisoned Ruby and exchanged herself for antidote and then bled and broke and broke and broke -

The grip she had on the chair tightened.

"Ruby?"

She forced herself to focus back on her sister, and the part where Yang had decided to call her out on her lie.

In retrospect… pulling the 'I don't want Yang and Tai to know and then tease me' card was silly and stupid - only Weiss had let her run with it, even if the stare her partner gave clearly conveyed exasperation and annoyance and you are an idiot, like she knew exactly what Ruby was up to (even if the part about not wanting Tai to know was true).

A part of it was also probably because Weiss didn't know what to say to Yang and Blake either… who, well, obviously knew.

And then things were finally making sense: Why Yang had visited the Schnee headquarters frequently, how Yang had taken to observing them at the same time, and at the same time seemingly ready to intervene.

Except her sister hadn't. Neither had Blake. They had trusted her and Weiss to make their own choices, despite that they hadn't really been upfront.

She felt gratitude soar in her veins.

Without warning, she reached up to wrap her arms around her sister despite the chair squished in between them, and hugged tightly.

"Thank you." Her words were muffled as she nosed her way into Yang's clothes, the familiar scent and warmth making her feel like a little child again. "For trusting us."

"I still have questions," Yang warned huffily, despite that a half-gloved hand was already dropping to ruffle Ruby's hair affectionately. "I wasn't happy about how all these started, even if I am happy that you two are working it out."

She squeezed tighter. "...Kay."

A lull of silence fell over them, until Yang spoke again.

"You're certain about doing this with Weiss?" Yang checked again like the older sister she was,
still petting her hair.

She hesitated.

"Not all the time," she admitted then, and truthfully. "But I want to."

She wanted Weiss. She didn't want anyone else to touch her. Weiss was her partner, and hers to protect. She wanted to be there with Weiss, and for Weiss. That had been abundantly clear for a while now, and when Ruby wanted something, she'd try her darndest best to get it.

Maybe this was what being in love felt like.

Not that she didn't love her, because she did, but there was love, and then there was love.

"Ruby?"

"Hmm?"

"I shouldn't have to say this, but if you hurt her, I'll kick your ass too."

She huffed a laugh into Yang's leather jacket, half exasperated and half resigned. "Too? Did you give Weiss the same speech?"

"Oh, I didn't have to. Weiss knows it's implied."

"She got mad at you, didn't she?"

Yang snorted. "I can take her."

She almost rolled her eyes in exasperation. If Weiss heard that, there would've been an imminent spar between the two with Blake and her running damage control. Those two were like ice and fire, literally and figuratively.

"...Hey, Yang?"

"Hmm?"

"I think you would make a really good PI."

A smirk.

"Right?"

...

Mist blue eyes studied the sole stalk of flower in between her fingers for a moment.

Purple hyacinth.

A humorless smile curled on her lips.

How fitting.

"Miss Schnee?"

She glanced over at the florist who had stepped up to her side, in those hands a large bouquet of delicately arranged flowers.
"Your flowers are ready. Please inspect it and see if it is to your satisfaction."

Weiss gave it a critical once-over. White carnations, white roses, white lilies… all that had been arranged in ways she couldn't even begin to discern, only that it was done for the purpose of making each and every petal stand out in subtle ways.

It looked elegant and beautiful.

Her mother, Weiss thought with a sudden nostalgia, would have loved it. It was so vague now, the memory, but she still remember wandering through a garden filled with flowers of all varieties as she fist in a small portion of her mother's dress.

And how white the flowers were, chosen not because of what they symbolized, but because they were the color of Schnee.

White was the color of purity and innocence to most.

But to her, it was everything.

"Is...is it not alright, Miss Schnee?" The florist asked, suddenly nervous.

She had gone too far into her thoughts, it seemed.

"It will do," Weiss said simply, feeling the almost weightless stalk of hyacinth in her hand. There was a brief moment of indecision before she spoke again. "Have this added to the bill as well."

Gently, she slid the purple flower into the centre of the bouquet - a color made more prominent when surrounded by a vast of white - before taking it into her own hands.

"Of - of course." The florist hesitated, taking the card that Weiss handed out after, before bowing and leaving her and Blake alone. "I'll be just a moment."

Blake, on the other side of her, was eyeing the flowers with mild curiosity. "White and purple?" mused the faunus.

Blue eyes looked over the flowers again for any signs of imperfection. But there was none; only the freshest stalks had been used, she could tell, and there was no odd discolorations of any sort.

A finger brushed against a soft petal.

"White and purple." She didn't disagree.

... 

"Do you know the meaning of purple hyacinths, Blake?"

Amber eyes glanced over at the slender woman, whose gaze was fixed outside of the window, chin propped up on a hand, elbow resting against the armrest.

On the window, as the scenery changed with every turn the car took, Blake could occasionally see mist blue eyes reflected on the reinforced glass.

Not for the first time she wondered if this was a good idea - especially since Weiss hadn't even bothered to mention the trip back to the Schnee Mansion to anyone else.

And especially since Weiss hadn't been back there once the funeral of her sister had passed.
If it wasn't for Blake's current job as her friend's bodyguard and head of security, she didn't think she'd have been informed either. Really… she should have known something was suspicious when the other instructed for her schedule to be cleared for the afternoon.

"A royal color." If the faunus knew this, it was only because it had been referenced in one of the books she once read.

"Hmm."

Her gaze flickered to the flowers resting idly on the empty seat. "Is that why you added it to the bouquet?"

A brief moment of silence.

"In part."

Her head tilted. "What else does it mean?"

Another long pause, before Weiss looked back at her with a quirked white brow.

"I suppose I could tell you if you'd like to really know," the president mused lightly with a faint, almost teasing smile.

For a moment, it was as if Blake was looking at a younger version of her friend again.

A far more hot-headed girl, who was haughty, prideful and often irritatingly snide. A girl who had looked past age-old prejudices and became a close companion. A girl who had resisted having fun with them initially but eventually joined with enough wheedling, with smiles and even laughter that came easily.

It reminded her of their time at Beacon when Weiss had finally loosened up enough to indulge herself in having fun - even if at her team's expense. Not that any of them had really minded. It was just good, really good, to see Weiss being Weiss.

Then everything changed, and Weiss… lost that.

"Do you read much about Greek legends? It seems a little out of the things you usually pick up on."

It was like ghosting cruel stab of reality, to remember that and know that they couldn't go back to that time anymore. A time that felt so normal. So right. So them.

"Blake?"

She let out a breath. "Occasionally. Some legends were interesting, but classical writings can be quite...long-winded."

Weiss didn't respond for a moment, simply looking at her with an indiscernible gaze that made Blake feel as if the other knew what she was thinking about.

"That is true," the white-haired fencer allowed, letting her lapse of concentration go. "I suppose I should begin."

She could only nod.

Hyacinth... Or Hyakinthos.
This was where the flower originated from.

Legend had it that the purple, bell-shaped flower could be traced back to a young Greek boy named Hyakinthos.

Zephyr, the God of West Wind, and Apollo, the Sun God had both loved and adored this boy. But the one that Hyakinthos loved more had been Apollo, and Zephyr was deeply jealous about it. So one day, when Apollo was teaching the art of throwing a discus to the boy, Zephyr cast a strong wind to blow the discus back.

It had struck Hyakinthos in the head hard inadvertently, and he bled. The blow was also strong enough to kill him. From the blood of the boy, hyacinth flowers grew. Apollo wept over the flowers in grief, and the God's tears in turn dyed the flowers purple.

Zephyr, in return, could only regret the mindless act of violence that ended the boy's life.

"...A morbid legend," was Blake's only comment after digesting it for a minute.

Now, she could also see why the other had picked up the flower and placed it in the bouquet. So many different meanings, and even if they didn't accurately describe things that happened - they were all things she could see Weiss relating to in many ways.

How very... Weiss-like, to do this.

Yang wasn't the only one who had a flair for theatrics. The white-haired woman did too - albeit in a far subtler way, and in a way one could never tell unless you knew what you were actually looking for.

Unless, of course, if the fencer wanted you to know. Then that would be a different matter. The blatant flaunting of wealth and haughty arrogance were some of the prime examples; while some gestures that Weiss did were habit, some others had actually been deliberate.

"Hmm." Weiss looked faintly distant, the usually icy gaze soft and unguarded. "That's true, too."

Perhaps even a little sad.

"...Is that why?"

A pause.

"Nothing that complicated," Weiss shook her head, that look still on her face. "It's because my sister loved this flower."

After a moment, Weiss looked back out the window, watching the sceneries flash by again.

Blake hesitated. "Are you... are you sure you're ready for this?"

"My parents would roll in their graves if I don't pay my respects before getting married," Weiss said sardonically.

It was an evasive, sharp response meant to deter her, she knew. More importantly, Blake had known her long enough to recognize that Weiss didn't mean it; this was her friend's defense mechanism working to keep walls up.

"And your sister?" she asked.
The faunus could see her friend closing mist blue eyes from the reflection of the window.

"I wouldn't know, Blake." Quiet words, calm, honest, and so far away. "I've… never been able to understand her."

"But what do you think?" she pressed, unwilling to let it go yet.

The silence stretched and stretched this time, until, at last, the white-haired woman spoke - with a voice so soft that Blake doubted she would have heard it if not for her enhanced hearing.

"I think she might be happy with my choice."

And Weiss meant that.

Despite the crack in that whisper that spoke of uncertainties and raw, muted pain, she could tell, and it made her suddenly giddy with relief.

There was a lightness of some sort curving around her friend's shoulders that felt like release, and it was as if invisible shadows were being chased away by the afternoon light soaking into pale skin.

It felt like a beginning, the first real, true and honest one after so many false starts.

It felt like finally having the courage to hope.

And it felt like forgiveness.

Blake smiled.

Then there was the faintest of a beep that made her ears twitch in surprise - it was too soft to have come from either their scrolls nor the driver and the other guard, but it was there.

It made her glance around the car in confusion.

And Weiss noticed, because she turned to meet her gaze with a frown. "Blake?"

Beep.

Her ears twitched again.

"You didn't hear that?"

A white brow arched. "Hear what?"

Something uneasy stirred in her stomach.

"The - "

Beep.

The car they were in exploded.

... 

A/N - Ahaha. :D

Ahem. More seriously, with the end of RWBY season 3 - which, yes, I have watched - there's a few things I should at least mention.
S3 will have little to probably no effect on this fic… or series, if I ever do come up with a sequel and stuff.

The fic has diverged from canon reality greatly. As an example, some people who are alive here actually aren't alive in canon, some limbs are still attached, and a specific building is intact… I'll admit there are certain references from S3 that I would use in the fic just because it's too tempting not to, but otherwise I'd consider Atypical and Cobblestone a complete AU from S2 onwards.

That being said: Many, many thanks to birdhymns from AO3 for volunteering to be a speedy beta.

Hope it was a good read, and reviews, criticisms, are all welcome. I've had a couple more reviews and constructive criticism from the last chapter that I wasn't actually expecting to see - and that had been really encouraging to me as a writer. Thank you for reading, and thank you, especially, for reviewing!
Captivity, last day.

"No, no - ! Winter, don't do this to me! Don't -- don't you dare!" Weiss was choking out a sob.

Her sister was in her arms, and she was trying desperately to stamp down on the blood that continued to flow and pool on the cold floor.

She had tried to get the weapon loose, away from both of them, but she was in too much pain and too weak, and Winter knew.

Winter, who remained steadfast, holding the weapon steady between their hands, angling it towards herself, pressing both their fingers to the trigger --

"Oh, be quiet," her sister finally grumbled, despite gasping for breath. "It's done and I want you to live. Do you hear me, Weiss? Live."

"You can't do this! You can't -- please, don't - Winter - !"

"Shush."

Her vision blurred.

"Listen -- listen to me closely, Weiss." Winter coughed. "I know you. You are stubborn and prideful… just like me. Like our family. And y-you are the last of us."

She felt hot tears by her eyes.

"But that doesn't mean you don't have others whom you can depend on," her sister murmured. "I've seen your team - they c-care for you greatly. I could tell. Am I right?"

She could only shudder out a shaky nod.

"Good. I know you won't take care of yourself. So you'll have to let them take care of you. Am I clear? P-promise me."

Her grip on Winter tightened, and she was shaking her head. "Don't you dare die. Don't you dare!"

A strained chuckle. "You know as w-well as I do that only one of us could have come out of this alive. That man and h-his machinations... are the work of the devil. Promise me, Weiss. Let your team care for you."

"Winter - "

"Promise me."
"I -" her voice cracked. "I promise."

"Good," Winter breathed out. "That's g-good. And you will know how to see me if you ever need to, don't you? I think... I think that's the only gift I can give to you, n-now. But you shouldn't open the gift until you are ready. Do you u-... do you understand?"

She was crying now. She, Weiss Schnee, was crying.

Their eyes met, one last time, and Winter smiled up at her. "I would've liked to hear you sing again, little snowflake. Your songs were always mesmerising."

How long had it been since her sister called her that?

"I'll sing for you when we get out of here," she promised with a choked voice.

"Mm." Slow breathing. "I would like that."

It would be another two hours before her team would break through the door, causing chaos and destruction of all sorts.

Two hours too late.

They would try to revive her sister - oh, how they did.

But it would be too late.

. . .

Present.

Blake's ears were ringing horribly, drowning all other noise there could be.

Raw, burning heat crawled on her skin, and it made her gasp with pain. Dimly, she realized that she was leaning back against a tree - when did she even sit up? - and it made her press back harder against the trunk in an attempt to gather her bearings, and to better feel her aura working to wash the burns away.

An explosion, her mind recognized. The car... the car exploded.

Despite the white edges in her vision and the way everything in front of her blurred, she could see the fire crackling, dancing on blackened metal in the distance, and smell the ash mingling with the scent of grass in the air.

The beeps.

It was a bomb. There was a bomb in the car.

Her mind went back to the person she was supposed to protect, and her stomach lurched.

"Weiss!"

But she didn't need to look far. In fact, all she had to do was look down on her lap, where Weiss had a tight arm slung around her waist - a hold that tightened just enough for her to realize the other was conscious, with eyes shut tightly and blood trickling down her temple.

The smaller woman was bleeding. But why? That type of explosion wouldn't have hurt them that
terribly when they were younger, much less now, when they were all trained enough to have aura protection up on instinct.

Then she remembered.

Weiss had cast her glyphs with the bare second she had, and crashed them both out the glass window just as the car exploded, flinging them into the forest where bushes of leaves could slow down their momentum.

And those glass windows had been reinforced to hold against attacks.

Now that she was looking, she could see the skid marks from the car to where they were, grass flattened and soil overturned as a testament to how roughly Weiss got them out.

Blake's lips flattened into a thin line. Her friend must have pushed most of her aura towards the glyphs, shielding them from the worst of the explosion.

"The - " Weiss's voice was rough, slowly getting up. "The driver -- Jonas -- and Mick --"

Something sank in her stomach. Any rebuke that was on her lips vanished at the reminder. The two men who were in the front seats of the car…

The explosion had come from there. If they hadn't died, they would be severely, severely, injured… especially given that even both Weiss and Blake were hurt and disoriented, despite having the split second warning to dig into their aura reserves to protect themselves from the worst of the explosion.

And even that was only after Weiss had reacted quickly enough to pull them out of the car.

A wave of rage hit her.

Those were good people, employees, friends.

Shakily, she reached for her scroll to activate the silent emergency beacon. She couldn't risk them making too much noise now, not when they didn't know what could be lurking around them.

She only hoped that her signal would not be caught by anyone unsavoury.

"Can you stand?" Blake redirected her attention to her friend, one hand gripping the shoulder to steady Weiss as she sat up.

Weiss gritted her teeth, pressing a hand to her face only to pull away after a moment, blood now staining pale fingers.

The president took in a deep breath. "Concussion," she growled just as quietly, something dark and angry in her shaky voice. "But I will be fine. I'll -- I'll get my summons to look around."

"Weiss - "

"Just until you get back your bearings, Blake."

The faunus bit back her protest, knowing what her friend meant. An explosion that close wasn't good for her heightened senses, and her ears were still ringing terribly.

She nodded back sharply, and Weiss pressed a hand to the ground, forming a white, glowing glyph.
The tip of a small nose appeared from the glyph first, followed by a white head, white eyes, and white fur.

A beowolf.

A Grimm, the full height of it that would reach Blake's waist had she been standing; looking so real and quite frankly, intimidating, despite Blake knowing that it wasn't literally a living creature, and that it would never harm Weiss.

Then another two more beowolves emerged.

Blake squeezed her shoulder. "That's enough, Weiss. You have a concussion."

The president gave the barest of a nod, her inhale of breath still shaky - shakier now, given that she was supporting three summons.

One of the white beowolves padded closer, until the tip of its nose nudged at Weiss's cheek.

Weiss reached up, pressing a gentle hand against white fur that really wasn't fur at all.

"Go," the white-haired woman whispered. "Scout for us."

They did, moving in three different directions.

Blake stood then too, a little shakily at first before steadying, scanning her surroundings. She couldn't afford to stay idle - or at least seated - when threats may be out there. At least when standing, she did not have as many blind spots.

Weiss hadn't bothered to move, trusting Blake to protect her; the pale hand was still pressed on the ground where the white, glowing glyph rotated.

It was silent for a short few minutes before Weiss snarled a vicious sound that made her look back sharply. That wasn't a good sign. "What is it?"

A long moment passed before Weiss spoke.

"There doesn't seem to be anything - or anyone - around us," the white-haired woman said through clenched teeth. "This might be a case of a simple hit and run."

Hit and run. How easily Weiss could just say that, when it was in actuality a case of bombing with intent to harm or kill.

But that was good news in light of the current situation, and certainly not something to snarl about. Especially since there was likely no other innocent bystanders nearby, given how rarely this road was used.

No, there was something else that made her friend angry.

"...And?"

"They are both dead." There was fury in her friend's usually curt words.

….Of course Weiss would've sent one of her summons to check on the two men.

"Find out who did this, Blake." Weiss was hissing like she wanted to rip the perpetrator apart.
"Find out."
The softness and vulnerability that the white-haired woman exuded moments prior to the explosion had vanished, in its place a hardened president whose Schnee blood sang true like ice.

And Blake would, not just because of the death of the two men. She would, because she saw traces of the friend, whom she knew like the back of her hand, being chipped away again; replacing it with this person who continued to tread on the thin line between light and darkness.

It made rage and sadness claw back in her chest, poisonous and consuming, so reminiscent of that time when Weiss had been unmeasurably difficult to deal with after the hospital --

She sucked in a deep breath.

Would they ever get past that time? Everytime - everytime - when Blake felt they had made a good step forward, something would inevitably happen and push them two steps back.

She wanted Yang here.

Yang, who had been the one to pull Weiss back from the edge when Ruby had been too guilty and terrified to try and ultimately, left.

Yang, who had done what neither Blake and Ruby had been willing to do.

Yang, who had protected Weiss from herself when they couldn't.

And for a moment it was as if it was happening again - the way Myrtenaster had pierced right through Yang's tattered, gloved palm hanging limply, the entirety of the palm encased in melting shards of ice that sizzled with the fading semblance of heat and fire; how the blonde had forced Weiss close, the one good arm that wasn't dripping blood all over the floor curling around the smaller frame in a steely, protective hold as Weiss shuddered for breath and -

Her teeth clenched.

It was an irrational thought, she knew. Because she had seen a Weiss who wasn't Weiss, and comparing this person who could grieve over two of her employees to that would be the worst insult she could ever throw at her friend.

"I will find out who did this," she said, forcing calm back into her voice. "I swear it, Weiss."

The ringing in her ears had finally stopped, and with it gone she could finally hear the sound of vehicles moving on the road in the distance. High in the sky, she could see choppers bearing the Schnee insignia traveling to where they were.

She couldn't help the breath of relief that was let loose upon seeing the symbol that she once hated and now worked for, knowing that, as long as nothing happened between now and the arrival of cavalry, Weiss would be safe.

But at the same time…

Blake looked back at Weiss again, watching the tension lining those shoulders.

"...Are you okay?"

The president responded by lifting her hand from the ground, letting the glyph disappear with a slow breath.

After a pause, Blake offered a hand - one that the other took after a moment of staring at it - and
pulled the smaller woman up.

"How are you feeling?" Weiss asked instead of answering, sharp blue eyes looking over her.

"The ringing has stopped." She squeezed that hand gently, understanding that her friend wouldn't answer without knowing how she was first.

The briefest of nods; Weiss released her hand. "I'm fine as well."

No, Blake really wanted to say, eyeing the blood that trickled down her temple. You aren't.

A hand rested on the pommel of Myrtenaster out of habit, and Weiss breathed in again, calmer and steadier. Blue eyes stared at the blackened metal and burning fire past the edge of the forest.

"The leak must be plugged, Blake."

"We are close," she promised. That the explosion occurred at all was a giveaway as to who could have been involved.

For a long moment, Weiss said nothing else.

But the grip she had on Myrtenaster tightened.

Blake did not like how her friend looked. It was too cold, too emotionless, too hard. It made the hair on the back of her neck stand, and something coiled tightly in her stomach.

"Weiss…?"

Another long pause.

"Whoever did this wants a war." A quiet murmur. "Don't they?"

She couldn't disagree. "Yes."

Weiss's eyes were like stone.

"They shall have it."

... Ruby slapped a hand to the panel, not caring how her hand stung for it, shifting from foot to foot impatiently as the door slid open.

Inch by inch, the slender back of Weiss Schnee revealed itself, white hair loose and reaching her waist with the late afternoon sun coloring her pale skin a burnt orange from where she stood by the window.

She was still dressed in her workwear, crumpled and stained with dirt and blood.

And even then, she was still breathtaking.

With a few quick strides, Ruby crossed the hospital room until she was standing directly behind the older woman.

The younger huntress itched to touch her. But instead, she took in a deep breath.

"Weiss? Are you okay?"
A moment of silence passed; Weiss turned to face her with unreadable pale blue eyes and folded arms. The tie around her collared blouse had been loosened, and there were specks of blood staining the white collar.

Ruby, despite herself, felt her gaze stray to the small bandage taped to the temple, bare hints of red seeping through white cotton.

"It's not as bad as it looks." Weiss's quiet voice, in that moment, was like a sound that managed to penetrate the cloud of anxiety that built up in her.

She reached out then, letting her finger graze gently against the dry gauze and brushing against soft white hair. Weiss allowed it; beyond a flicker of something in her eyes, the older woman did nothing.

And Ruby couldn't help herself.

Her other hand lifted, and then she was framing her partner's face between her shaking hands, peppering soft kisses to the bandage, forehead, nuzzling her cheek, breathing in the scent of ash and fire, feeling the cold metallic earrings grazing the back of her fingers…

"You're okay," she breathed out, relief warring with raw fear in her chest. "You're okay."

She had blanked out when she received news of the explosion - it had been Yang's fierce reminder that they were alive that shook her out of her stupor. Having seen Blake moments earlier, who seemed weary but otherwise fine, had only lessened the nervous thrum of fear in her marginally.

In front of her now - Weiss's blue eyes were blazing with an intensity of something she couldn't describe, couldn't understand. Before she could even begin trying to guess at what they were, Weiss was already reaching for her, one hand fisting in on her shirt, lips slanting over her own with practiced ease.

The white-haired woman was rarely the initiator between the two of them - but today, apparently, was different. Ruby's back was suddenly pressed against the wall next to the window, her hands sliding down the slender back, and she felt the curve of the spine beneath her fingers.

Weiss did nothing to discourage her touch, only pressing closer for the briefest of the moment -- and then she was breaking off the kiss but still leaning against her. Blue eyes remain closed, but there was a furrow in those aristocratic white brows that reminded Ruby not all was right then.

"You need to decide," the older of them whispered.

"Decide… decide what?" she asked in her confusion, still half-dazed by the kiss.

"I…" Weiss breathed in heavily. There was a strange and sad note in that quiet voice, something that told Ruby how weary the other was. "You need to decide if you really want this thing between us."

Her confusion all but grew, and the other must have felt it, because Weiss was speaking again.

"You know there's a target painted across my back. And now, you."

The grip she had curled around her partner tightened; in contrast, Weiss had flattened the hand she had on Ruby's shirt, faint heat emanating through it to her skin.

"Whoever's behind these attacks," Weiss was saying, quiet and calm, "grows more daring with
each try. I was supposed to be at the Dust processing factory today, and the time of the explosion matched the time of my intended arrival."

An explosion combined with the volatile properties of Dust. Everything would have been leveled to the ground, and the aftershocks of it would have reached the city.

All the damage that could cause...

Ruby swallowed. "But you weren't there."

"No." A ghost of a humorless smile flickered, but then it was gone as quickly as it came. "I wasn't."

If she had been there, things would have been very different.

Unreadable mist blue eyes opened to meet her own. "So you need to decide if you really want to be with me, Ruby."

She blinked, utterly baffled. "What do you mean?"

Weiss retracted her hand, stepping back and away from her embrace. Blue eyes traveled over her for a moment, before looking out the window again.

"It's going to happen again," Weiss said finally, folding her arms once more, face like stone. "When it does, it may cause more than two deaths this time." A pause. "And I can't promise that nothing will happen to me, or you."

Ruby frowned. "We have talked about this before, and I told you -"

"And if I lost control?" A simple, direct question.

She clenched her fists. "I won't let that happen."

A smile did quirk up at that, on Weiss's lips, but there was absolutely nothing humorous about it. "How do you intend to make sure of that?"

"I'll do whatever it takes," Ruby said firmly. "You know I will."

Something like sadness seemed to curl around Weiss's shoulders then.

"At any and all costs?"

"Whatever it takes," she repeated stubbornly, unwilling to budge.

"...You killed Adam, and it haunted you."

Ice flooded her veins. She still remembered the feeling of her scythe sinking into flesh, feeling the warm blood splatter on her cheek, hear the choked cough the man gave -

Crescent Rose was intended to be a weapon against Grimm, not against human or faunus. She built it, maintained it, enhanced it -- all for the purpose of protecting humanity from harm and to fulfill her dreams.

But on that very day, with her precious weapon, she had consciously spilled the blood of one such man despite knowing she could have captured him.
It didn't matter that he was vicious or destructive or even driven by hate for the one person she would always want to protect. It didn't matter that he was the reason rage overtook her. It didn't matter that he had hurt Weiss so terribly that the scars would stay with her for life.

All of that didn't matter, because none of them changed the simple fact: It was deliberate murder.

"He was the reason you left." Weiss's soft words seemed so far away now. "The reason why you couldn't bring yourself to touch me then, let alone look at me."

She couldn't respond, throat locked, paralyzed where she stood.

It was all true. She couldn't, because Weiss felt so fragile then - so how could she ever let herself touch her partner with those hands that were stained with blood?

"For a while," Weiss said quietly, "I thought it was because you couldn't bear to look at me as I was ultimately the reason you killed him."

She jerked from that statement. "What?" The dots connected a second later: Weiss had been blaming herself. "No! Weiss, that wasn't - "

The other shook her head. "I know." A pause. "I just didn't know it then, Ruby."

There was a hint of something raw and hurt in that soft voice, almost so indiscernible that Ruby probably wouldn't have detected it had she not been looking for it.

She felt guilt wash over her.

"Weiss - "

"Please," Weiss cut in with a long inhale of breath, the faintest of tremors visible in it. "Let me finish."

Her mouth clicked shut.

"My point," the white-haired woman begin again, "is that regardless of why, how, and the end results of it - is that you've killed for me. It's a debt I'll never forget, nor can I ever repay it."

A long pause.

Another deep breath, and Weiss turned to meet her gaze again.

"Being with me will hurt you." Her partner looked as if exhaustion had sunk deep into the bones. "I'll never willingly hurt you, Ruby. But you will get hurt, either by my own machinations, yours, or others. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

The ramifications of them all weighed down on her shoulders.

This was what it meant:

i) Injury or death.

Targets painted across their backs. What more could be said? They might bleed, had bled, and still walked into danger with eyes wide open anyway. It was their career, their lives, their choices.

ii) Adam.
She killed him. For Weiss, Ruby Rose had murdered. And she would have done so willingly again regardless of the consequences to others or to herself.

iii) Weiss Schnee lived in a world of morally gray, and Ruby Rose was someone who would always want to do what was right.

That part of Ruby who learned what it meant to be a leader had realized this early on - the white-haired president could be ruthless. And it wasn't as if she couldn't understand it - she could. Despite how brilliant and successful Ruby's plans may be, she had to learn the hard way what it meant to prioritize, to do what was best as opposed to what was right.

But that didn't mean she wasn't hurt by the consequences. Ruby Rose was someone who felt deeply, and her every choice as a leader had affected her greatly.

So whatever Weiss might choose to do… whatever Ruby herself might decide because of that… they would all affect her. None of them would have been unavoidable.

"It seems like you do understand," Weiss said softly, watching the turmoil of emotions in her gaze.

Her partner sighed again, and then there was a faint, sad and self-depreciating smile on those slender features. "But I'm selfish, too," the murmur floated to her ears. "So you need to decide, here and now, if you still want this thing between us."

But why? Why now? Why ask this now, after everything they had already gone through to get where they were at now?

And she must have spoken them aloud, because there was a flicker of something in mist blue eyes, followed by a calm response.

"Because if you do, I don't think I can let you go anymore."

Silence reigned.

It was Ruby who broke it.

"Weiss," she breathed, half astonished and half speechless, reaching out to let her fingers brush against moisture on pale cheeks, framing that face again with both hands like it was a fragile, precious thing that would shatter at the slightest touch.

Her partner's eyes were blue and bright and beautiful, with hints of burnt gold and orange from the late afternoon sun reflected in that gaze; her entire posture speaking of the sort of steel and fragility that could have come by only after enduring all she had.

"Don't cry," Ruby whispered, begged. "Please don't cry."

Weiss closed her eyes again, hands clutching at Ruby's elbows, as if uncertain as to grip tighter or push her away.

Ruby didn't give her a chance to decide. She brought her close again, pressing lips against tears, gently angling her partner to be better able to kiss her. She kept at it, kept at it, until the other responded fully and a noise that sounded like surrender caught in Weiss's throat.

"I want you," Ruby whispered then, against her lips. "I want to be with you. And I'm never letting you go, Weiss."
For the briefest of moment, Weiss seemed to waver, as if she didn't know whether to let Ruby do this or reject it, despite knowing that the younger huntress meant them anyway.

It was a conundrum, of sorts, because even though Weiss had many reasons to let it end, Ruby had just as many as to why she would not, if not more.

And the most important reason of them all?

"Want to take a guess as to why, Weiss?" Her question was solemn, but there was something that felt light and almost mischievous in those words. She nuzzled against pale cheeks; touched their foreheads together as she curled her hands around the slender waist instead.

Blue eyes opened to meet her own, seemingly incredulous at the sudden question and affection that seemed so out of place when taking into account what Weiss was trying to do.

But her partner did respond, if rather mulishly. "No."

"Really?" Ruby started to rock them gently, which made Weiss grip at her sleeves once more.

"Yes, really." Weiss exhaled, seemingly exasperated by this turn of events.

"Not even a tiny mini little guess?"

A twitch in white, aristocratic eyebrows.

"Ruby."

Ah. And there her partner was, replacing that person who looked as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Ruby felt herself grin at the look of discontentment on Weiss's face, because she knew Weiss wasn't actually mad.

"The answer to thaaaaat…" There was an air of exaggerated solemnity Ruby had that was blatantly an act, and one that made Weiss all the more exasperated.

Ice blue narrowed at her. "Don't test my patience."

"...Is that I can't let you go anymore either, Weiss."

Shock flickered past those eyes. Ruby didn't let her gaze or smile waver and tightened her hold, rebelling against the very idea that Weiss might just try to escape.

All cards were on the table now. Not that they haven't been for a while now - but sometimes, just sometimes, Weiss actually needed a reminder to look at them and remember that their cards were a mirror to each other.

So Ruby waited, watching the storm of emotions in the depths of that gaze.

Too many times now Weiss had tried to give her a way out, and each and every time Ruby had denied and even rebelled against it. But things were changing again now.

The things that made them work, the little pieces of gears that made them them, had been displaced for a long time - and now… now they were finally sliding back to where they belong.

And then:
There was the shaky breath that felt too brittle, the look on Weiss's face that spoke of so much and made her feel like her heart had been grasped by an ethereal fist, and words that would cement what were to come for however short their lives may be.

"Then... I am yours. And you are mine."

In those words there were neither victory nor loss - just something raw, precious, and bittersweet.

Finally. Finally.

. . .

A/N - I'll admit I sort of laughed every time I got called evil because of the previous chapter. Sorry!

Spoilers inbound here for S3 RWBY below, so read on at your own peril.

As you may suspect, because Weiss being able to summon has become a canonical fact, I did end up altering this chapter some. I can also say that I liked this version better than the one I first half-finished before watching S3.

That said… even though I did pick up on the summoning and Winter's characterization, majority of other canonical facts from S3 would still be set aside, chief among them characterization of certain characters that has since changed from S1/S2. I'm not usually one to stray to what-will-now-be-deemed-ooc-if-S3-is-taken-into-consideration if I can help it, but. In this case, I'm just going to wave a white flag.

Ahem. One more update is incoming -- there will be some revelations, and some… interesting moments. Do stay tuned.

Many thanks again to birdhymns from AO3 for helping beta this. Reviews/Criticisms, as always, are welcome and encouraging.

Thank you!
Graduation, three days after.

Not all stories had tidy endings.

Least of all theirs.

It was something that Weiss said to them a long time ago, at the edge of Beacon's grounds overlooking the Vale city, with the late afternoon sun and remnants of destruction from the breach on their skin.

And how apt that phrase was. It really was just the first step of a long, hard road, wasn't it?

Ruby wondered if her mother thought the same when she graduated from Beacon.

A smile, true and big, broke out on her lips.

The snow crunched under her feet as she bent in front of the grave, a hand lifting to brush away the snow that covered the words engraved on the stone.

"Hey mom."

The soft wind greeted her back.

"Ruby Rose has graduated," she cheered to the cold air, "and became a huntress!"

She was finally what she dreamt of being. A real huntress. Four years of studying, training, fighting -- and she had made it. She had made it. Then, she plopped down unceremoniously on the snow, cross-legged, her thick cloak taking away the bite of the cold ice.

Weiss, who had been as silent as a ghost two steps behind her, sighed at the unladylike action.

"Sit with me, Weiss?" Ruby patted at the red cloak that she spread out on the ground.

"I can stand, thank you." Even without seeing it, she could tell - her partner was scowling.

Ruby tilted her head backwards as she curled her hands below the knees for support, eyeing the other from upside down.

"Please?" she beseeched. "I wanna introduce you to mom."

The white-haired huntress just frowned, arms crossed. "And you can. As we are."

She honestly hadn't wanted to resort to this measure. But she would if it would get her what she wanted.

She pouted and made her eyes big. "Please? You promised we could do whatever I wanted today,
and this is our last stop before we go to the port."

Weiss was the very picture of rueful irritation. "I know what you are doing."

Ah. Was she caught?

But then again, her friend had four years to learn all her tricks. Still, that didn't mean Weiss was immune to it. And if Ruby were to wager a bet, she'd say it was pretty far from it, especially given what she wanted in this particular scenario.

Her partner was ever polite, after all, especially to those Weiss felt deserving of respect. And she wouldn't do something on the contrary... like engage in an argument with her in front of her mother's grave.

"Weissssssss... please?"

Her partner resisted for a moment longer before scowling again, seemingly unwilling to scold her then and there. But the look in those blue eyes promised a lecture and retribution later.

"Move," ordered Weiss.

Ruby cheered and scooted to the side of the cape, making sure to pat down on her cloak again to cover as much snow as possible. It was certainly tricky, since she still actually had it clasped to her shoulders. But, they were both small in size, so it wasn't an impossible feat.

There was a moment of hesitation, then Weiss lifting Myrtenaster from where it was hooked, before the petite woman settled down on the cloth - and somehow still managed to do it in a very ladylike manner.

The rapier now rested on the snow within easy reach.

Their shoulders touched and their legs grazed each other, and Ruby paid it no heed. It wasn't the first time they were in close quarters, after all.

"Mom," she gestured, "this is Weiss, my partner. I wanted you to meet her. She's had my back for the last four years -- and she's the best teammate I could ever have."

Weiss merely inclined her head regally. "Hello." A pause. "It's an honor to finally meet you."

Silver eyes cut to her partner. Her partner looked awkward, like she didn't quite know what to say. That wouldn't do, hm? Now what could she do to fix that...

She took a moment to hatch a plan, flitting through ideas and discarding them as quickly upon assessing the pros and cons.

"Ruby..." Weiss had turned to watch her, seemingly full of hesitation now. "Are you alright? You're being really quiet."

Crap, how long had she been plotting?

Suddenly, blue eyes was narrowing suspiciously at her. Something on her face must have given her away. "What are you - "

*Plan, execute!*
She grabbed hold of Weiss suddenly, enclosing her in a tight hug that the other wouldn't be able to escape without harming her and turned to face the grave - and relishing the way her partner had squeaked in surprise.

"Wanna know how we met, mom?" Weiss had stiffened in her arms. "Let me tell you now, it was memorable and explosive introduction…"

"Ruby, I don't think -"

Said girl squeezed tighter until the white-haired woman huffed out a breath, the protest interrupted. Weiss knew her tricks by now, but hey, she had her own counterattacks too. And her partner had always fit easily in her arms, petite as she was.

"It was our first day at Beacon! I wasn't really looking at where I was walking, so I actually slammed right into Weiss here, who then gave me the scolding of my life - "

"Ruby!" Weiss looked and sounded truly flustered now, struggling to get out of the hug.

The banter between them filled the silence after - mostly her with her mischief, and Weiss with her objections and occasional corrections. But eventually there was amusement in mist blue eyes as stories were told, and Ruby who flushed when Weiss took revenge by teasing her right back.

The stories ranged - from their first meeting to their shaky start of a partnership, the Nevermore, then to how they worked out their differences, learning each other's histories, and eventually, a rock-solid friendship --

They really had come a long way from that first day they met, hadn't they?

Weiss, who had finally relented and relaxed, looked at the grave for a long moment before speaking.

"Your daughter has the makings of a great huntress," Weiss said, calm and respectful, "And I am honored - to have been given the chance to be her partner. She is good at what she does, and… I know that she will only prove to be so much more as she strives towards her dream."

Beside her, Ruby had gone red with embarrassment, something the older of them was pointedly ignoring. "Weiss…"

The white-haired woman coughed and stood, dusting off imaginary lint as she picked up the rapier. "Time to go, Ruby. We have a flight to catch."

A wave of sadness washed over her suddenly.

Weiss was finally returning to Atlas for good, to helm the SDC. For a few weeks leading up to their graduation, she had been going back and forth between Beacon and Atlas, and today… today would be the last time.

Team RWBY… RBY… would only be there for half the flight; mainly because of the hunters headquarters that they were supposed to report to for their first assignment right after graduation. But for the one member of team RWBY, concessions were willingly made.

A slender hand was offered to her. "Up."

She took it and allowed Weiss to pull her up, relishing in the faint warmth emitted by her partner.
Weiss moved to retract her hand after, but Ruby tightened her grip. The blue eyes that flickered back to her were questioning, but unguarded.

A white brow lifted in silent query.

"Remember what you promised me?" she asked, feeling a sudden need to double check. Maybe even triple check.

For the briefest of moment, Weiss seemed to soften, but then she was giving her a look of wry amusement and resigned irritation. "Would you like me to say it again?" Sarcasm.

Ruby squinted back at her. "You would do that...?"

"No." Weiss glared, seemingly affronted that she even asked. "But I know my promises. And I don't break them." A sniff. "Kindly do not insult me by insinuating I would forget what I said."

But her partner was also squeezing Ruby's hand back gently, and something in her eased back, satisfied at what wasn't said.

"Now let's go before we miss the flight. We've been out much longer than I expected us to be." A pause, and Weiss tugged her hand away, gesturing - if a bit awkwardly - at the grave. "I'll give you a minute."

With that, the white-haired huntress stepped back and turned to face the forest.

The sky was rapidly darkening into night, with the shattered moon bright and washing over them.

Ruby took the moment to look back at the grave again.

Bye, she said silently. I will come again, mom.

Then, with an exhale of misting breath, she turned and walked towards her waiting partner.

If she'd only known what would transpire in the very forest that they were walking in, setting into motion a path that she never dreamt of happening.

i. Blake Belladonna.

It took her exactly seventeen days after the attempted murder of one of her dearest friends to discover the person responsible for it.

The faunus stared at the black-haired man before her, hand gripping Gambol Shroud tightly.
She found the traitor. She had finally found him. After so long - after so much time pouring over evidence and reassessing the timeline - they -- he --

*Why was it him?*

"Was it worth it?" she couldn't help but ask, trembling with fury.

A small smile curled on his lips. "Few things are ever worth it, Miss Belladonna."

"Did you even believe in what Weiss had been trying to do?"

The smile did vanish this time, and with it, a hint of disapproval that made Blake want to hiss and bristle appearing in its stead. "Of course I did. That's why I put forth my best effort to help her."

It was true - it was only with his support that Weiss managed to gain back control of SDC so quickly after the events that two years ago. Morale and trust had been low, and he had been very influential. With him publicly behind her, control was wrestled back quickly.

Without him - the company, the public - they would all have descended on Weiss like wolves. That was why this had been so hard to swallow.

"You tried to kill her *twice*."

"Au contraire, Miss Belladonna. It was only once. I have never meant for her to die in the dust mines."

The implications of it sank in.

"You made sure the bomb went off before she arrived," the black-haired woman breathed out in disbelief and astonishment. It was all starting to make sense. No sane person would've allowed such a trivial error when it came to setting off a *bomb*.

He inclined his head.

"All those -- " the faunus in the mines. The dead. "You - " *All those lives. "Weiss trusted you!*"

"It was a means to flush out the White Fang. I needed them to trust me."

She just stared in pure disbelief. "How could you -- how could you even justify *this*?! Weiss would never have agreed to it! And you kidnapped Ruby to lure her out to that warehouse!"

"Ah, but she came out unscathed, did she not?"

"You bastard - "

"Do you not agree that her life - her *visions* - are worth all their lives? Do not forget, Miss Belladonna -- what she does, *dare* to do -- it is akin to backing a wild animal into a corner. Left alone, White Fang *would* cause unforeseeable damage."

The grip she had on Gambol Shroud tightened. "You sick son of a bitch."

This man had been double-crossing White Fang, playing spies on both ends. Cid Raines, who had been a mentor when she took up the position to protect Weiss, who taught her about the intricacies of diplomacy and unseen dangers, who was part of her friend's inner circle, part of the trusted board - a man whom she thought honorable, who *believed* in the same things Weiss did -
"What changed, then?" she hissed. "Why did you try to kill her? You could have wiped out hundreds of lives at the factory with that bomb in the car!"

Something like rueful amusement sketched itself onto his face. "Except she had chosen the most inopportune time to visit graves."

"Why?" She couldn't understand him. Despite the extreme methods, this man had helped her - helped **Weiss**. Then, like a flip of a switch, he backstabbed them. "Why do this at all if you really believed in her?"

"I lost." For a moment, he looked regretful. "And now I am a puppet. Be careful, Miss Belladonna. The White Fang… not all is what it seems with them. I hope you do realize Weiss is still an active target, even at this very moment, and not by me."

How could someone ever be such a damned **walking contradiction**?

The woman who was beside Blake had heard enough.

"We will take it from here."

**Hell no.** Blake wanted his **head**.

Pale blue eyes, lighter than even Weiss's, looked directly at her. If it wasn't for the fact this person had light pink hair, she could have easily passed as a Schnee. "You should return. It is best that you ensure the president of the SDC remains well protected."

There was a clear warning in those words - and in Cid's, despite how indirectly he said it. **Weiss.**

She gritted her teeth at the reminder. Despite the fury that raged in her, she was - fortunately or unfortunately - still self-aware enough to remember that Weiss was more important than dealing with him. Slowly, she forced herself to loosen the grip she had on Gambol Shroud.

Cid, on the other hand, was eyeing the new person with interest. "**Lieutenant Lightning Farron,**" he murmured, and it made Blake's ears prickle. She had forgotten that they knew each other. Fought by each other's sides once upon a time, even, because of a certain case involving Serah Farron.

The pink-haired woman lifted her blade, staring at the man with hard eyes. "We have you surrounded. Are you going to come willingly or do we have to do this the hard way?"

He smiled, a hand resting on the pommel of his sword.

"You have a death wish," Blake hissed, gripping her weapon tightly again.

With deliberate steps, Lightning moved to stand in front of her, eyes still on the man. "Go home, Belladonna. Tighten your security."

A finger tapped her shoulder lightly. "She's right. We will handle him."

She turned to meet the green eyes of a tall woman - taller than Yang - with hair a shade of grey so dark it was almost black.

**Oerba Yun Fang.**

"Go. And maybe think of an explanation of why you thought of confronting him alone, eh? You
are lucky we were on the same tracks." Fang raised an eyebrow. "I don't think your family would be very happy with you about it. Bad habit, Blakey."

She was right. Ruby wouldn't be happy, but Blake had a feeling she'd understand why she did it. Weiss would be mad at her, yes, but also at… everything else.

Yang… Yang would be furious at her.

But she had needed to be sure it was him who did it before anything else. If Blake was wrong, she would've needlessly caused grief for her team. She needed -- needed -- to hear it from him, because this betrayal would hurt Weiss.

Especially after she saw how Weiss edge back to how she had been after that damnable car bombing.

Blake exhaled again, slow and long, finally letting the death grip she had on Gambol Shroud go.

"Make sure he bleeds," she bit out at the other woman.

Fang snorted. "I'm sure he will, given what stance he's taking."

_Good_, she thought viciously.

With another deep breath, Blake turned, and left. She had security to plan.

__ii. Yang Xiao-Long.\__

Four days had passed since, with Blake mostly making herself scarce while Ruby kept Weiss occupied -- for as much as the white-haired woman would allow, anyway.

Which really wasn't much, considering. On top of matters with SDC - because there was damage control to perform now - the president herself had been _quiet_. That in itself wasn't unusual, no, but Yang would've preferred to actually see her seethe or even break something in rage.

But, no, Weiss was weary, quiet, and _hurt_.

It was quite literally the one combination she did not ever want to see coming from the ice queen. Or from any of her team.

And then there was Blake, the very heart of Yang's frustration.

The blonde itched to punch something.

Or to be specific, a problem that she _could_ actually punch. That would be extremely easy. She was
good at punching! One of the best at it, even.

But none of these were actually punchable. Yang didn't want to punch Blake.

No, what Yang really wanted to do was a permanent way to shake some sense into her - because if there was a competition of falling back into bad habits running, both Weiss and Blake would have been top contenders for the spot.

Such a way didn't exist however, so what she did upon entering Weiss's office was flop down on the three-seater couch by the corner. Then, grumbling none too quietly, she picked up a pillow, and pressed it over her own face to block out the entire world.

And though she couldn't see it, Weiss was rolling her eyes.

"Exactly how long," the very dry words came, "do you intend to sulk?"

"Blake's avoiding me," was her muffled response.

"Ah."

Yang moved the pillow a little, just to better peek at her white-haired friend leaning back in her own couch, gaze on the documents in her hands.

Every now and then when she dropped by the office, that was exactly the position she'd find Weiss in. A part of her wondered if it was because the other knew she had arrived.

"'Ah'?" she mimicked grumpily, now tossing the pillow up into the air and down. "That's all you've to say?"

Mist blue eyes cut to her at that.

"Is there something in particular you wanted from me?"

She squinted back at her. "Where's Ruby?" she asked instead.

"She had a Grimm-hunting mission scheduled."

"Huh. You telling me she didn't swap with someone else?" Yang had actually expected Ruby to feel quite torn about it. While it was Ruby's dream and desire to help protect people, there was still the matter of Weiss's current… status.

Said person gave her a pointed look. "She's a huntress. There are lives on the line."

This was Yang's inner-translation on that phrase: Ruby probably wanted to swap with another hunter because of everything involving Cid Raines, but Weiss had likely insisted for her to go instead. Better yet, there was a very high chance that this was the ice queen's way of reminding Ruby that she had her own life to live.

Yang quirked up a grin, now attempting to balance the pillow on a finger. "You're good for my sister, Weiss."

Weiss twitched, something indecipherable flashing past those eyes, but didn't comment. That in itself told Yang plenty, and not all of them good things.

But before she could say anything, the white-haired woman spoke again. "Blake has been busy."
The pillow slipped, dropping onto her stomach with a soft thump. "Busy?"

"Hm."

"...One day, on at least one conversation that we will have, you will not give me one-word answers, Weiss." Yang hadn't gave up on that yet. Very much still a work in progress. It was also one of Weiss's bad habits, one that had seemingly developed ever since she specifically had to spend time with Yang.

The barest of a smirk settled on Weiss's expression. Ooh, the girl was just challenging her right now.

Yang would show her one of these days, damn it.

"Blake's reworking security," Weiss said. "There are... some things that needed to be re-assessed."

"What things?"

"Procedures. Protocols." A pause. "People who were recommended by Cid when he worked for me, and before that, my father."

She may have felt a spark of rage at the reminder, but it was the weariness that flickered in Weiss's expression that made her eyes flash red for the barest of a moment. If Cid Raines was in front of them right now, she would've gutted him.

And why was Weiss being so mild over the entire fiasco?

"Am I waiting for a Weiss-style bomb to explode?" she asked bluntly.

Blue eyes blinked, startled by the strange query. "What?"

"I'm talking about you, ice queen."

"A what bomb?" Weiss looked perplexed for just another moment before realization sank in, and an icy glare was directed her way. "You are the rudest person I have ever had the displeasure of meeting, Yang Xiao-Long."

"And you're the iciest queen I've had the pleasure of setting fire on, ice queen." Get that? Eh? Eh?!

Weiss had a look of complete exasperation and annoyance on her face. "Your puns are still as terrible and crude as ever. Get out of my office, you brute."

She attempted to emulate a puppy Ruby. "You're kicking me out?"

The other just stared at her stonily, clearly unaffected. "Yes."

Damn. She failed.

"And for the record," Weiss said icily, "I'm angry too. But Cid is already dead. I have no time nor energy to waste on the dead."

That was a harsh statement. Harsh, but also clinically true.

Yang gave her a long, hard and assessing look.

The man who fought against one Lightning Farron and Oerba Yun Fang plus backup - choosing
death over facing justice when everything had backed him to a corner. She couldn't understand his motivations at all, nor his reasons.

But some part of Weiss seemed to. And if nothing else… Weiss just looked a little sad. Worn. Resigned.

That was when realization set in.

"You are…" Surprise colored Yang's words. "You're mourning him." That was why Weiss didn't seem angry. It wasn't that she wasn't, it was because she was also sad and hurt by his death.

The look Weiss directed at her was indecipherable. "Cid Raines was a family friend."

Of course -- he had worked for her father. For years. Then for Weiss. It was no wonder she trusted him. He had been with the Schnee family through a decade's war with White Fang, when friends and relatives were killed, before he broke that trust.

Yang didn't know Cid personally - just through an off-mention from Blake now and then - so she couldn't really relate.

But Weiss clearly did. And Blake did too, on some level - she could tell that the faunus had respected him.

The white-haired woman was exhaling. "You can do away with your expectations of a 'Weiss-style bomb' exploding. It's not coming, alright?"

That roundabout sentence was as close to an assurance her friend would ever give, Yang could tell.

But it also proved just how far Weiss had come from that time. And while it was a testament to how Weiss had picked herself back up, to Weiss' strength, Yang had a feeling some part of it had to do with the presence of her sister. With Ruby.

Now what was it people said about what marriage meant… something about being able to lean on your own partner? That may not have been why or how the entire thing started, but, well. The way these two went on and on was telling enough.

Her lips itched to form a grin.

Yang raised her eyebrows instead and pointed an accusing finger for effect. "Did you just re-use my pun?"

Weiss pinched the bridge of her nose. "Go away. Talk to Blake. And do have your issues resolved before the marriage. I will not have both my teammates sulking on the day."

Ah. The marriage. Due to happen in two weeks. All things considered, it was still on track despite the numerous incidents that occurred between then and now. That was also probably why Weiss's (and maybe Blake's?) schedule had been increasingly hectic lately.

Yang tried for a smile, and then flipped the pillow again. "But you just said she's busy?"

"Is there a question somewhere in there?" There was condescension in Weiss's dainty little sniff. "She makes time for you."

She paused, then grinned. "Good point."

Weiss pointed at the door.
"Go away, Yang."

She rolled her eyes, and stretched as she stood.

At least the matter of 'Weiss-style bomb' was something she could put to rest now, leaving just one other.

For a moment she contemplated on how to corner a certain faunus so that they would have a proper chat, then turned to leave the room.

Crowding Blake's space. That always worked.

Yang leaned against the doorway of the meeting room with folded arms and watched.

Blake was deep in discussion with Velvet by the large monitor fixed on the wall, gold eyes focused on the large map displayed, and information that was running down the screen, unceasing.

Velvet tapped at her tablet, highlighting a spot in Vale onscreen.

"This area is the last one being surveyed for the living conditions of the workers, as per the proposal set by Mister Raines."

The head of security just nodded. "Take a team and check it out."

"Of course." Velvet's eyes cut over to meet Yang's. Clearly, the faunus had noticed her the moment she had arrived. "Yang," the faunus greeted with a smile.

She offered a wave and a grin.

Beside the faunus, Blake had turned to look at her, too, seemingly unsurprised. But, and this Yang noted with a bit of frustration, she was also choosing to school her face into something unreadable.

Then, with a completely cheerful smile, Velvet said, "I'll leave you two to talk."

Yang stepped into the room, making way for the other - who patted her lightly on the shoulder - and the door shut behind them.

And now that they were alone, the smile vanished from her expression.

Silence reigned.

The blonde really couldn't deny that she was angry. Still angry, even. But she had a few days to cool down, and in that time she had started to put what pieces she had together.

Specifically, what made her partner think it was a good idea to act alone - especially when Cid Raines was a renowned hunter all on his own before he got elected to be a part of the council leading the hunters, and soon after moving on to work for Weiss's father.

And as far as she could tell... this probably started around the time the car exploded, didn't it?

But she still didn't know why.

"So," Yang leaned back against the wall, folding her arms again. "Are you going to tell me why you started falling back into bad habits?"
Blake visibly twitched at that. "I wasn't -- that wasn't what I was doing."

Yang couldn't help the wry grin that formed. "Hate to say this, Blake, but you kind of were."

"I -- " The faunus pressed her lips into a thin line, and looked back at the holographic screen. "I had it handled."

She growled. "The wrong way?"

No response.

Sometimes trying to get a real answer from Blake was like pulling teeth.

She crossed the room to her partner's side, instantly flicking the switch to turn off the monitor, and forced Blake to back against it as she stepped right into her personal space.

Emotions flickered in gold eyes, too fast for her to catch. "Yang - "

Yang braced her arms on either side of Blake's body. She stared down at her partner.

"Tell me why," she said as calmly as she could.

Blake's throat worked, but then she was looking away and somewhere past her arm, ears flattening in a turmoil of conflicted feelings.

...Damn it. Her partner looked like a guilty and distressed little kitten that just couldn't figure out how to make things right again, and it was working wonders in making Yang's anger subside. She liked kittens.

It was criminal, the way her partner could ease her fury without even realizing it.

The blonde really hoped she would never realize it, because it was a dangerous weapon for Blake to have. It should be fine, though... as long as Weiss never tattled. Because that cocky brat had noticed during their time in Beacon, and wasted no time in telling Yang so with a very amused and knowing look.

Whipped, the damned girl had mouthed to her with a smirk and in a moment of uncharacteristic mischief. Yang had been torn between incredulous laughter and slugging her.

With a sigh, the blonde lifted Blake's face with a finger under the chin to better look at her.

"Do you trust me?" she had to ask.

Blake's throat worked again. "You know I do." There was no hesitation in the response, and despite - despite! - the conflict warring in that gaze, she was gratified to find the honesty and vulnerability in there.

She felt herself soften at the admission. "Then talk to me, Blake."

"I..." Still the faunus hesitated.

Yang shifted, hand now moving to the side of Blake's neck, massaging away the tension that had built up there.

Blake relaxed. Marginally.
"Talk to me," the blonde repeated, thumbling over the cheek gently, keeping their gazes locked.

A long, long moment of silence.

Then, finally:

"...It felt like Adam all over again." Blake sounded so haunted, hands - like instinct - moving to grip at the lapels of Yang's leather jacket.

The blonde's brows furrowed. "What do you mean?" That bastard was already dead. "What does he have to do with this?"

And more importantly, Adam was a sore subject that Yang never felt inclined to bring up. Not just for Blake, but also for Weiss, and Ruby - her baby sister who had to be the one to put him down.

He had hurt all three of her teammates in very different ways, and thinking about him just made her want to seethe with rage.

"I trusted Cid," Blake looked down again, words hollow. "Weiss had understandable reasons to trust him, but I didn't. And I shouldn't have."

The grip on her jacket tightened. "He told me about wanting to send surveyors to the mines, to check on the faunus living there and I said okay and then…"

The pieces were clicking into place. Oh, no. No, no, no.

"My people died, Yang." The crushing guilt in that trembling voice. "I kept wondering just how someone could've planted a bomb there and - I thought I must have missed something and - " Blake broke off again.

Then her teeth clenched. "My people died because I trusted him."

She just stared.

"He got to Ruby." Now, the faunus sounded furious. "He hurt Weiss. And people have died. All because I was careless around him."

"Blake - "

"Yang, I trusted him and he murdered hundreds of people! I trusted Adam and he murdered thousands! Don't you see that I was the common factor here?!!"

Silence reigned.

Yang, for her part, stared half in disbelief and half in astonishment. This was what her partner had been carrying around for the last few days? For months since the explosion in the mines?

"Why didn't you tell me?" she breathed out, and there was something rushing through her blood right now. There was heat just brimming beneath her skin, waiting to be let out if Yang couldn't reign it in.

"I - " A shuddering breath. "You are -- between all of us, you… you are the least damaged."

Blake's voice cracked. "I needed you to stay that way, Yang."

And that was a truth that stung Yang deeply. Of all of them, she had been the least affected. The least hurt. Not that none of these hadn't affected her, but what she would just give to take any of
their places in an instant.

Blake moved to grasp Yang's gloved hand that was still on her neck. "This here," the faunus said quietly, "this one was the worst that you had."

Her finger twitched involuntarily, knowing immediately what her partner was referring to.

That time when Myrtenaster had pierced right through her hand.

The black-haired woman was already moving to remove the fingerless glove, unbuckling the strap, placing Ember Celica on the table -- and laying bare twin scars that were an inch in length on the front and back, and the small, flame-like burns borne of dust and aura.

Blake stared at the scar, tracing it with trembling fingers.

"If Cid… if he hurt you, too, I wouldn't be able to live with myself."

*The foolish girl.*

Anger blazed in her now, true and bright - the majority of it was at this *Cid Raines*, but part of it was at her damned partner. She shifted them around without warning, lifting a startled Blake to seat her on the table.

Then she leaned in close, confining her partner with hands on the hips, and glared right into her eyes.

"None of these," she scowled, "are your fault. You are not responsible for these attacks." She could see Blake gearing to protest. "You didn't plan to do all these, did you?"

The faunus actually flinched at that. "*No!* I would never -"

"There is a difference," Yang cut in with a low voice, "between taking the blame for people dying or getting hurt, and for what you couldn't stop. And this, Blake?"

Yang just knew her next words would hurt her partner. But it needed to be said.

"This," she growled, "is you taking on something that's *not* yours to take. You cannot take the sin of one man and make it *yours*.

What happened to Ruby and Weiss wasn't on Blake. What happened to those lives wasn't something she perpetrated. Whatever that would happen to Yang wasn't on her either, and Blake just need to *get* that.

"But it's -"

"Does either Weiss or Ruby blame you for what happened? Do you *think* they blame you?"

Blake's throat worked to respond, fists tightening. Her voice cracked. "...They should."

Ah, there it was. "Then you do know that they *don't*.

Her partner looked ready to flee, eyes glistening, and it hurt Yang to see that.

She struggled to reign in her temper.

"Blake," she breathed in deeply, framed that face with both hands as gently as she could to better
look at her. "I'm mad at you. I'm really mad at you. But you know that already."

The faunus swallowed. "Yes."

"So I am going to say this once only," Yang begun slowly, and as calmly as she could, "and you need to - you need to remember this. You need to understand this. Because the next time you pull this shit on me again, I swear to god, I will punch you. Do you understand me, Blake?"

A jerky nod.

It was the pain on Blake's face that made the simmering heat just beneath Yang's skin ebb away.

Yang exhaled slowly. "The choice to blame you or not is not for you to decide." She thumbed that cheek gently, brushing against moisture. "That's for Ruby and Weiss and I to decide. Not you. You cannot - cannot - choose for us, Blake. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Judging by the flicker of emotions in those gold eyes, the blonde could tell that Blake had not actually thought about it in that way. The faunus didn't think that she had been deciding for her team, or that she was forcing the choice onto them.

Yang could understand why, she really did. When you are so used to thinking about things a certain way, it would be hard to realize that there was another way of seeing it.

But Blake was finally - finally - reaching back out to her, trembling hands grasping at the lapels of Yang's jacket, eyes full of things unsaid.

With another long breath, Yang pulled her partner into her arms.

Blake didn't say anything yet, but her face pressed into the crook of Yang's neck, and she was nosing her way in as if trying to sink further into the blonde's protective hold.

And then there were the silent tears, and it made Yang squeeze tighter.

A number of things remained unresolved still, the blonde knew. There were still things they needed to talk about, chief among them Blake's habit of blaming herself for something she didn't do.

But that could wait.

That could wait, because Yang had a feeling that Blake was finally getting it, and seeing what needed to change. And, for now, it was enough that her partner had returned to her.

"Why did I have to fall in love with an idiot like you, Blake?" Yang whispered to her.

Blake strangled out a huff, seemingly torn between incredulous disbelief and pain and laughter at the sudden question.

"I don't know." The faunus's voice, muffled as it was, was raw. "You have a thing for broody people?"

Yang's lips twitched. Then she affected a long suffering sigh. "You're damn right I do."

That choked out another trembling laugh from her partner. "I love you too. You know that, right?"

Yang felt a smile form, and tightened her hold.

"Course I do. Idiot."
And the clock winds. Trying to instill brand new habits into Blake and remove bad ones would be like trying to bend steel with bare hands unenhanced by aura, but they would get there eventually.

Things weren't perfect, and they probably never would be.

Ain't anything wrong with that, though.

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iii. Weiss Schnee.

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And then... it was finally done.

Vows had been said, papers signed, the union celebrated, and the wedding had since come to a close.

It was quiet now, Weiss having retreated to her study as Ruby slept.

The clock ticked.

She leaned back against the chair, tired, running her left hand through white locks of hair to brush them away - only to pause when a glint caught her eye.

Weiss stared.

On the fourth finger of her left hand, a slim wedding band made of white gold had taken residence at a spot where it had been bare her entire life - with carvings of roses and her glyphs intertwined around it.

The jeweller, she mused with the critical eye of a Schnee, had done well to craft a pair of rings that suited Ruby and her. Sleek, clean and elegantly designed. Overly glamorous designs had never fit Weiss well despite all the wealth to her name, and gaudy ones would not have been suitable for a scythe wielder like Ruby.

It was almost weightless, the wedding band, but Weiss could still feel the imprint of it around her finger, cool and metallic, unfamiliar but not unwelcoming.

It was a clear indicator that she was Ruby's in name.

Ruby's.

She wasn't quite sure what to think of that.

In all honesty, Weiss still wasn't sure what made this happen, or how they even got to this point.
The very idea of it was *insane*.

Yet…

Here she was, tied to Ruby in a way many would consider sacred and holy and precious - and left in a haze of strange apprehension, confusion, and wry amusement.

It made her wonder what the future would hold for them.

With a deep breath, she closed her eyes. She curled her hands together, pressing them against her lips like a silent prayer.

A glyph, pure and white, formed to life on the floor past her work table.

*Come.*

She breathed in again, and poured more of her aura into it.

*Come to me.*

She thought of another pair of eyes whose color was a shade of her own blue, of white hair and a stern gaze, of a sharp mouth, of hands that protected her --

A bright flash of light pierced through the closed lids of her eyes, and she was suddenly drained of strength.

Slowly, she loosened her white-knuckled fists, and leaned back against the chair.

For a long moment, despite knowing what it was that stood in front of her now, she did not open her eyes. Because if she did - once she did - what could she say? What would she even do?

Her hands gripped the armrests tightly.

What could she ever say to the person whose life was sacrificed for her own?

The room felt strangely silent, despite the soft, unnatural wind circulating around the study - the only non-visual indication that her glyph was glowing gently on the floor.

With another deep breath, she opened her eyes.

A slender figure stood in front of her, above the rotating glyph, dressed in pristine white dress shirt and pants, an easy hand resting on the pommel of a rapier, while the other was behind her back.

Winter Schnee looked strong and dignified, with shoulders straight and chin up, face without emotion. There was a layer of soft white light over her, making Winter look so real and alive and ethereal that Weiss felt her eyes go strangely hot.

The memory was still so fresh, despite the fact it had been two years.

How this person had curled Weiss’s shaking hand around the Dust gun with a firm hold, and then pressed both their fingers to the trigger without hesitation -

What could she say to her sister who bled in her arms after, who whispered gentle words as Weiss frantically tried to stem the flow of blood leaking from her stomach, heedless of the cold, unmoving eyes that watched them from a distance?
What could Weiss ever say to this person who knowingly let herself die only to return as a summon, where she would stay by her side?

And what excuse did Weiss Schnee have for never having summoned her even once, except for this very moment?

She breathed in again, the faintest of tremors running past her from head to toe.

Then she spoke.

"Do you know that I'm still angry at you, Winter?" Her words were calm, too calm.

Winter remained emotionless, looking at her wordlessly.

She just stared back.

"Why did you choose for me to live when you could have lived?"

A familiar pain was stirring again, blanketing her with raw grief.

"Why did you let me live?"

But there were no answers; just her summon staring at her in the silent room, face wiped clean of anything that would give anything away.

There would never be answers.

Weiss's eyes shut, unwilling to look at her sister any longer, and she pressed a shaking hand to her own face. She could feel moisture, and it made her grit her teeth.

_Dust. Dust, dust, dust._ This wasn't going the way she wanted at all. She breathed in deeply again, willing herself to calm down.

A minute passed, so did the second, and after - Weiss _really_ didn't know how long - an indeterminate amount of time, her composure finally returned. She opened her eyes to stare at the other again, forcing her arm down by steepling her fingers together into a tight ball.

"Forgive me." A quiet murmur. "That's not what I intended to say."

Her summon said nothing.

"I - " her voice cracked, and she stopped. She took another deep breath. "I will never forget what you have done for me. You will be remembered, Winter."

She was irritating herself with the way she was behaving, all shaking tenor and redundant words. What had she been thinking? She wasn't ready for _for this_. She was not _ready_.

Her fingers tightened, pressed close, until she could feel the sculptured engraving of roses on the cool wedding ring brushing against her skin.

Weiss looked down at it. When her grip loosened and she started to twist the band around as if trying to make it fit properly, it was an unconscious action on her part.

What, she wondered then, would Ruby say about this?

Probably something incredibly dorky, with shining eyes and a dropped jaw. And the word that
would inevitably annoy her - *cool*.

There was absolutely nothing *cool* about this, regardless of what Ruby may have to say about it.

She huffed, feeling some of the tension ease away from her shoulders despite herself. Her partner always did have that effect on her, making her torn between irritation and affection. Worse now, Ruby had that effect on her even when she wasn't actually there, and Weiss didn't know if that was a good or bad thing.

With another exhale, she looked up, and back at her summons.

"I will honor your sacrifice." Weiss said finally, as quiet as a ghost and like an oath. "And I will honor you by keeping my promise."

Her sister just stared at her wordlessly.

A faint, wistful smile curled on Weiss's lips despite herself. "Say hello to mother and father for me, alright, Winter?"

Winter Schnee closed her eyes, still saying nothing, body transforming into tiny flakes of snow, fading into nothing as they touched the floor.

It was beautiful. Her sister didn't have to disappear this way, of course - she could've cut off the flow of her aura to the glyph, and the summons would simply disappear without a trace.

But Winter deserved to go in a manner befitting of her.

"... *Ich werde dich vermissen. Auf Wiedersehen.*"

German was an old language that felt strange on her tongue - she was proficient at it, but it had been a long time since she had spoken it.

She supposed it was only right to use it now, where only a Schnee could understand it. After all… it was a language native to her family. A heritage. And a Schnee could never forget where her roots came from.

When the soft white glow from the glyph finally disappeared, Weiss let loose a slow, long exhale and leaned further against the chair, feeling drained.

She was alone again.

...No.

That was a lie.

Despite her best efforts, there was one person who were never far from her thoughts. One person whom she had grown more attached to than she ever thought possible. So much so that, even when the person wasn't physically present, she could still feel the presence beneath her skin, in her blood down to the bones - lingering and faint and intimate, and so very permanently there.

Permanent…

It was permanent, was it not?

There was no turning back now, not since that moment with Ruby in the hospital room, when she had been -- when she had finally given in. It was reckless. It was dangerous. It was driven by
emotion.

But she had been too exhausted to continue fighting.

She stared at the wedding band on her finger again for a long moment. And then -- in the privacy of her study, she brought the cool ring to her lips, and kissed it gently.

Perhaps it was pointless to have even tried resisting it.

After all… Ruby Rose was the one person she had let all the way in.

Then came a knock on the door, and it jerked her out of contemplation. How long had she sat there, just thinking and remembering?

"Weiss?" Speak of the devil. It was Ruby.

The door opened.

"What are you doing?" her partner was staring at her now, looking concerned, inquisitive and softened by sleep.

The white-haired woman shook her head and slid out of the chair. "Nothing of importance." A pause. "Did I wake you?"

Ruby hesitated, then shrugged - an odd action, if Weiss had anything to say about it. She wondered if she needed to address it.

Ruby was still speaking, though, so she decided to leave it be for the moment. "When someone you have been hugging all night is suddenly missing from your arms, you'd notice too." Silver eyes cut to the clock by the side. "It's been two hours."

Two hours? *That* long?

She hadn't planned to be away for so long - she must have really been that lost in her thoughts.

"...I was comfy too, you know." Ruby gave her a crooked grin. "And I like being comfy."

Weiss stubbornly ignored the faint heat she could feel on her neck, walking around the table towards the other. "It's late - or early, actually. Go back to bed, Ruby."

The younger huntress responded by framing Weiss's face with gentle hands, silver eyes bright and searching and not all that sleepy anymore.

"Are you okay?" A quiet, warm question.

She couldn't help the smile that formed despite herself. "Yes." And it was true. She was okay.

Ruby searched for a moment longer - something Weiss didn't actually mind for once.

Then, seemingly satisfied, the other laced their hands together.

"Come back to bed with me," Ruby murmured.

She squeezed back lightly, and did.

The door closed behind them, leaving one last drop of snow floating by the book case.
That, too, faded completely into nothing as it touched the floor.

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iv. Ruby Rose.

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Her hand remained frozen on the door knob.

She heard it.

Those words, raw, crushed and heart-wrenching, echoing through the door.

"Why did you let me live?"

It made her go stock still.

A part of her wanted to slam the door open and shake her partner and demand answers because how could she ever say that? The way Weiss had phrased it -- it -- that --

It hurt.

Her partner had wanted to die.

She had known, of course - oh how she had - and so did Blake and Yang. But they all had doggedly made sure Weiss hadn't withered away. There was no other choice to make - Weiss was theirs (hers), and theirs to care for.

But to actually hear it… to actually hear that desire, so deep-rooted and real, chilled her to the bones.

The grip she had on the doorknob tightened.

No, she forced herself to remember. Weiss was better. And still improving, even now. She was finally - finally - learning to live, and Ruby refused to endanger that by letting her reckless side take over.

It had taken her a long time to understand when was a time to act and when wasn't -- and she knew better now. She knew better.

There were the tell-tale signs of summoning glyphs even without having to see it. Ruby could feel some sort of unnatural energy in the air, cool and almost windy. And she was familiar with this one, having watched and felt it many times over their time at Beacon.

Ruby couldn't intrude on this, not this intensely private moment.

The white-haired woman had never talked about her time in captivity, and Ruby never asked.
However, that Weiss had summoned her sister -- it was so telling in what happened then.

Steeling herself, she took in a deep breath, removed her white-knuckled fist from the door knob, and sat against the wall next to the door. Arms curled around knees, and silver eyes closed.

And she waited.

The air changed.

For a long moment after Ruby stood up, she rested her forehead against the cool wooden door, one hand fisting on the knob again. It was completely silent on the other side, and she both dreaded and wanted to know what the other was thinking about now.

If nothing else, despite that she couldn't begin to guess as to what Weiss might be thinking - there was, at the very least, one thing she was sure about.

She trusted Weiss. She trusted Weiss to do right for herself, for Ruby, and for their team.

They had come too far to let a moment of vulnerability destroy them, and deep down Ruby knew that this moment with Winter Schnee had everything to do with Weiss wanting to make things right.

But Ruby was still only human - she had seen Weiss at her worst, and it had hurt her deeply. That sort of pain, that haunting fear, it wouldn't go away so easily.

So, with a deep breath, she knocked on the door.

"Are you okay?"
"Yes."

Weiss looked wistful and breathtaking all at once, and the first thing Ruby wanted to do was pull her into a tight, tight hug.

The problem wasn't that Ruby had questions.

The problem, truthfully, was that she already knew the answers.

And not all of them were good answers. Some she understood but didn't like anyway. Some had hurt Weiss. Some had hurt Ruby, too. And many of them simply haunted Weiss Schnee for who she was, and there was nothing Ruby could do about those.

So when Weiss didn't offer any resistance, she led them back to their room, pressed her against the door, and nudged their lips together.

This she could do.
"How long were you waiting outside my study?"

It was a simple and direct question.

Weiss, in those moments after sex, was idyllic if not seemingly ethereal.

Especially when the sky was a dusky grey, casting some sort of shadow over her partner that made her seem all that more unreal.

Her chin was propped up on an open palm. Soft white hair was loose and flowed down her back and pale skin not covered by the blanket, spreading across the sheet. And those blue eyes that looked down at where Ruby lounged were so clear, and yet, still unfathomable.

She blinked up at her.

"...You knew?"

A white brow arched up.

"It wasn't hard to guess."

"You aren't mad?"

"Should I be?"

"...No?"

"Is that a question, or an answer?" There was a hint of amusement in those quiet words.

This felt strangely familiar. It was like that night all over again, when Weiss had pulled her out of the nightmare's grip.

"Both?" she answered a little hopefully. "I didn't want to intrude, so I waited..." she trailed off. *And you wanted to be alone.*

"Hmm."

It was times like these when Weiss was incredibly hard to read. It made her nervous.

"So... are you mad?"

A split second silence.

"No." A pause. "I shouldn't have left you alone, when it's our wedding night."

It was one part apology, one part acceptance, and one part justification. Perhaps that was why Weiss didn't ask if Ruby had heard anything while she was at the study.

Ruby couldn't help the crooked grin that form on her lips at that. "I told you. You matter to me, not the marriage. And besides..." Faint mischief now colored her tone. "It's not like we haven't had sex before today."

Weiss did flush at that, glaring at her. "You are incorrigible."
In the days after that moment in the hospital, things had gone down hard and fast between the two of them. Ruby had stopped being patient, and Weiss no longer had her foot on the brakes.

To Ruby, the marriage was merely a formality, a means of legalising things. It meant little to her, because the things that Weiss meant to her could never be described by what was on a piece of paper.

So did Ruby care about the marriage?

She did, of course -- it was the very start of what brought them together after all. But perhaps this was better way to put it: It wasn't really at the top of her list of concerns.

And it was a sentiment that Weiss agreed with, she could tell. The marriage was important to the white-haired woman, but for very different reasons, and many of them political.

Political…

That just reminded her of things that happened since. Some mysteries had been resolved - and Ruby had seen how Weiss was affected when Blake told them about Cid Raines and what role he had played.

It wasn't pretty. That Weiss had never trusted easily to begin with just made it worse. In fact, much of what it did was make Ruby want to dig a deeper hole to bury Cid in, though not before she let her sister slam a fist into his face, and Blake to empty Gambol Shroud's magazine into him.

And there were still many things unresolved, White Fang being the foremost of them all, up and including who could have pulled the strings of a powerful man like Cid Raines.

A gentle tap on Ruby's cheek pulled her out of her thoughts.

"You look angry," her partner murmured, chin still resting on the palm, head slightly tilted at her, the words half simple observance and half a question.

In the darkness, the wedding ring on Weiss's finger glinted faintly.

This was another strange thing between them. When Weiss was angry, she wasn't. And when Ruby was angry - despite it not being frequent scenario - Weiss wasn't. Why was that the case?

The white-haired woman huffed out a chuckle at that. "You are a dolt, Ruby."

...Had she said that aloud?

"Dunce."

Despite herself, she pouted. "That's never getting old, is it?"

"When you ask strange questions like that?" Amusement glimmered in mist blue eyes. Another teasing tap on her cheek. "No."

And for a moment it was like seeing a younger, less burdened Weiss Schnee.

She relished those moments, and if that meant being called a dolt or dunce, she could live with that.

Not that everything was fine or perfect, but they had each other, they had Yang and Blake, they had friends and family they could depend on… and they were all still well and alive and breathing.
Ruby knew that not everything would turn out the way she want. That would be unrealistic, and she was no longer that naive, innocent fifteen year old who had so much to learn.

That was fine too, though.

Ruby's hand reached out to curl around Weiss's slender waist, tugging the other down to rest on her again.

Her partner offered no resistance. But just for a moment, when white hair tickled her face, Weiss paused.

"At some point," Weiss said softly, fingers lingering gently on Ruby's cheek, "we are going to have to talk about a child. Among other things."

But not today. They had time, after all.

"Okay," she agreed easily.

Something like rueful amusement and irritation crossed Weiss's expression. "You need to stop saying yes to everything I say so freely, Ruby."

Her eyes crinkled with humor. "But I don't wanna say no."

"I know. That's why I said that. You..." There was a brief silence, sadness that flickered in those blue eyes, and quiet words. "You give me too much."

She wanted to give her everything.

"Then you are an idiot," her partner replied. She had spoken that aloud too, apparently.

Weiss was also looking impossibly soft, with the most tender expression Ruby had ever seen. "But I guess that's okay too."

"Uh huh... why's that?" her hands moved; found purchase on a bare back. Weiss's fingers was still brushing against her cheek gently.

There was the barest of a smile.

"I told you before. I'm yours. And you are mine."

Ah.

That was true, too.

And that was that, she supposed.

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Fin.
A/N - Wow. It's done. For a while I didn't think I'd actually finish this… that's how bad I usually am with long fics.

The translation for the German dialogue: "I'll miss you. Goodbye."

(Know that German isn't my native language though, so I'll apologize beforehand if I wrote that wrong.)

I hope the way this epilogue was structured worked the way I wanted it to? I also hope I did Yang right -- as usual, she was the hardest to write, and took the longest. Ruby was another, in part because of the overlapping scene. I didn't want to make it… feel like a repeat? Kinda.

That said, for a while now I had been vaguely hinting on a crossover to FF13 -- not that this was intended to be a major plot device, mind. I just generally prefer using existing characters as opposed to creating one if I really have to put OCs in, and the honors had gone to the cast of FF13.

Now on Atypical… I've seen stories with plot that had run off-course - and it's something Atypical was dangerously close to. Especially with the bomb in the car scene. It felt vital (to me) to have that scene, because Weiss is someone you really need to push hard and far to finally see her let go.

But, such an event meant having to introduce the whys and hows and all the other things. They are important enough to warrant some detailing, but I didn't want to move the focus overly much because that's not what Atypical is about. More importantly, when Weiss is ready - and she is - that's when this story is winding down to a closure.

There are, of course, numerous other items that remain open-ended. The future child, Blake's habits, the Weiss-stabbed-Yang-part that everyone seems entirely too curious about, war, et cetera… Those questions are likely better answered in a potential sequel or prequel.

As far as immediate plans go, I probably should take a look at Cobblestone again -- fix up stuff if need to given how I've Winter portrayed now. And maybe clean up on previous chapters of Atypical for consistency, with some issues already flagged and in need of fixing.

For longer term plans… a little break, maybe further exploration in the universe of Atypical. I'd also like to hear what you might want to read about, to that end. It would give me an idea of what direction I should try focusing on.

If you got through that long ramble, here's a couple final things.

I've had a few messages asking if this was really the end, and to not end Atypical -- it really makes me happy that the fic was enjoyed to such degree. And sad, too, because I've really enjoyed writing this. But, I hope you can see why I felt that it was time to bring Atypical to a closure.

A big thank you to birdhymns for beta-ing this epilogue, and for helping me poke and prod at Yang! She's been a great help in pinning Yang down, whose scene(s) I struggled with the longest.

And lastly… thank you all, for reading, and also for reviewing.

Towards the end, feedback on the fic had increased a fair bit, and that was... I actually wasn't expecting them. So it was really a big surprise for me. I'm sorry I never got around to responding personally to some of you - but please know that I read and received all your feedback. You've all been very encouraging, and that was really what helped me push this to completion. So thank you.

I'll be around. You're also always welcome to bother me at tumblr, too. End the day with a Yang, eh?
Ciao.

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*Series Title: The long, hard road.*

*Stage 1, Cobblestone: Completed 4 February 2015.*
*Stage 2, Atypical: Completed 20 March 2016.*
*Stage 3: Coming soon?!

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