The Knights Errant

by vase

Summary

Decisions both major and minor can lead to big changes. Missing their chance to attend Beacon Ruby, Yang, Weiss and Blake will still need to come together to escape their pasts and reach for a new and brighter future.
Blake never expected it to be simple.

One does not simply walk away from the most powerful terrorist organisation on Remnant, even if that was almost what she'd hoped. Being raised by what was now a standing army in its own right granted Blake insight, but not immunity. The White Fang, Adam, her former fellow soldiers, they would not simply let the cat Faunus slink away into anonymity.

'But would a single day letting up be too much to ask!?' Blake wondered as she tried to ignore the beating of waves against the ships grey-steel hull. Gambol Shroud rested on her back, just barely avoiding scraping against the corner she'd hidden away in. Surrounding the dark haired Faunus on all sides were red and blue shipping crates, each one marked by the runic white glyph of the Schnee family. Blake was growing to hate that symbol in a manifold of ways she'd never imagined before. They surrounded her every time she woke and went to sleep. They were everywhere Blake looked as she snuck about the massive transport ship, stealing food and water only to run back and hide in the tiny refuge she'd made for herself in the ships bowels. Her surroundings were a reminder of everything she'd fought against and all those she'd left behind.

"Hmm," Blake hummed, bringing her left arm up before her eyes and clasping her hand in quick harsh snaps, calloused finger tips bouncing off course skin. 'It took a few days but I think I'm back at one hundred percent,' Blake mused. Sighing, she closed her eyes and tried to stretch, not an easy task given the square foot or so of space she'd been able to make for herself.

'That girl... she was human, definitely,' Blake thought, thinking back to the one who'd left her arm torn to shreds by unseen chains, and crawling for the nearest escape in the first place. 'Green hair, red eyes, chain pistols, tan, and human, very, very human.' Blake had not had an easy time of it since abandoning Adam in the woods but that girls attack had been the worst of it. Blake had a multitude of plans and ideas for escaping the White Fang but each one only ever half made and poorly thought out at best. She'd memorised maps, but made no plans for where to go. She knew contacts in the cities, but could not guarantee their safety or willingness to help her. She knew how to get to Beacon, but had no idea if she'd even be allowed in.

And of course her pursuers hadn't made it easy. She may not have seen Adam but his familiarity with her followed the lesser White Fang soldiers who'd harried her through forests and pursued her in cement jungle cities like a stench. 'Tire me out, hem me into a wide open space and leave me no where to run,' Blake mused. It had been clever, and it would have worked in theory, except she'd be capable of fighting her way past the average White Fang soldiers so their efforts had only slowed her down. Escaping them would have been easy with no high ranking members present, but then the girl had appeared, bullets and chains raining from the sky. 'Was she a mercenary or someone else?I can't imagine they'd so casually employ a human, it makes no sense and yet...'

Blake closed her eyes and sucked in a breath. 'It doesn't matter now, I got away and once I'm at Beacon they won't be able to touch me. From there I can... I can...' For all her ambitious plans and fragmented dreams of a future without the violence of the White Fang or the prejudice and exploitation that made their existence so natural Blake still could not say how she planned to do
anything about it all.

In a vein effort to distract herself Blake pulled out her beaten, and stolen, grey Scroll and flicked it open. The holographic screen flashed to life with and she scanned the shipping schedule, 'Wait... No that can't be right, we're late!?' Blake thought. 'We should have arrived by now, the ship was scheduled to land while it was still dark but we've barely moved! Why haven't they started unloading the stock?'

Blake's ears twitched beneath her bow and lacking better choices she flicked her Scroll shut and pulled her two black cat ears free from their confines and momentarily allowed them to stretch and flex atop her head. Sliding forward Blake rested her palms against the cold steel ridges of the Schnee Dust crated and kneeled on the floor, the vibrations of the sea tickling her senses as Blake pressed one eye up against a strategically placed crack in her crate-fort. Only to be nearly blinding by a stinging flash of gold as light flooded the massive crate filled chamber. Skirting around her few spy holes Blake saw each stair-way entrances filled by what looked like half a dozen armoured guards with more filtering in behind them.

Drifting through the air snippets of hushed conversations brushed her ears, "Keep together, eyes wide, we can't let her take us by surprise. Especially not with all this Dust around," the voice emphasised as Blake began to shake.

'They know? How!? I didn't, I-' the blocks fell into place in Blake's mind with a dreadful finality as her expression dropped from wide eyed disbelief to gaping disappointment, her entire frame went limp as she let out a hushed gag and slid to her knees. 'Of course they wouldn't just let me go! If they can't catch me they'll just out me as a White Fang and let the police do their work for them!' It was absurd, the amount she could tell the police, a Hunter, anyone, was too much to risk them catching her over and yet they did it!?

A faint tremor was Blake's only warning, a subtle little vibration running through the floor that was just a bit too firm and steady to be someone passing by. That was all the warning she got before the shipping container in front of her screeched as it was pulled back in a violent blur.

Acting on instinct Blake jumped up, leaving an after-image behind her that exploded under her as someone's fist tore through it. A loud toll rang throughout the ship as it obliterated her copy and struck the floor. Blake slammed into the container above her and launched herself off, dodging the next metal tearing blow, hitting the wall she gasped as dozens of taser bolts soared towards her. "Rrr!" Blake threw an image barely centimes in front of her to take the tazer-bolts and leapt in front of the trench coat wearing Hunter who'd first attacked her.

He was a giant, thrice her width and twice her height, the red headed square faced hunter held a blue shipping crate above them with one metal gloved hand as he brought his right down as if to slap her. The massive gauntlets around his fist surging with Dust and the blistering yellow light of his Aura.

Blake launched herself up at her foe, intent on sneaking over the giants shoulder and passed her other pursuers. He was faster though, even as his hand found empty air his head shot forward and met Blake's with a violent crack that sent her crashing into the floor with a cry, "Ah!" His foot was buried in her stomach next and Blake was hurled into the wall with a clang. Even as the world around blurred and shook from the dizzying strikes Blake used a flurry of hysterical flailing to subtly slipped an Freeze-Crystal from her back pocket. He closed in on her with a single thudding step. A glowing palm strike flew towards her chest and Blake knew the mighty seismic vibrations would tear her insides apart if she let it hit! Blake flicked a hidden release on Gambol Shroud and unleashed her cache of Burn-Dust into the air. Blake threw herself below the strike, pure speed and
fear driving her down as she left behind Ice and Fire Dust pumped full of her Aura to meet her attackers similarly Aura infused strike.

Blake’s ear shook at the sound of ice crackling and snapping as it mingled with what sounded like the first spark of a fire sprung to life above her. In an instant Blake was lost in an explosion of mist as her attacker bellowed, "What!?" More shots were fired as Blake blurred past the Hunter, she weathered the tazer shots and jumped into the air, soaring over the police and landing atop a pile of shipping crates in the centre of the room with a clang.

"Fire! Shoot to kill!" Someone bellowed, even though the hull was already lit up by a cacophony of gun fire. Already running, Blake sped past her would be killers, deflecting any shot she could with her black sheath in one hand and katana in the other.

"Damn you!" The Hunter bellowed from below as he hurled the Dust crate into the air and right at Blake's head.

Blake fell into a roll, sliding across the Schnee Shipping containers as one of their brethren flew overhead, air-waves wafting across her skin. Blake dragged Gambol Shroud's blade along the containers base, letting Dust crystals and powder fall atop her. Slipping her hands around a few Red Dust Crystals Blake ignored the shaking that signified the Hunter was now atop the crates with her. Instead of turning to fight him Blake slashed her blade over the ice blue Dust beneath her and let her Aura flow through it, accompanied by the taint of red fire she buried the ship in mist once again.

Not wasting a second Blake spun around, she threw her right arm back, shoulder tensing she dragged Gambol Shroud's blade behind her as she charged. She forced Aura through the blade's frame, building up the pressure until it felt like it would explode in her hand hand. Swinging Gambol Shroud's glowing purple sword forward, Blake unleashed a blade of curved energy into the ship's hull that tore through it with a thunder-clap! Leaping out of her attackers grasp by mere inches Blake found herself propelled forward by the explosive force his attack and she was sent soaring into the sky and passed the docks.

Docks that were filled with police, an airship and several police cruisers spread out across the land and sea, officers staring up at her with expressions of shock and rage. It hurt, Blake hadn't thought she could still feel such a crushing sense of loss and disappointment, least of all for something she'd never had. But the image of her half-made dream crumbling before she'd even started was almost too much to bear. Eyes quivering Blake felt like she could have wept.

But the survival instincts of a warrior dragged her back to the moment at hand and Blake conjured another double beneath her feet and kicked off its back. Launching herself into the sky and over the closest airship she unleashed Gambol Shrouds whip and lassoed the Bullhead's wing. Spinning around it in a wide arc Blake slingshoting herself back into the air at blinding speeds, the wind whistling past all four ears so loud it almost drowned out the gunfire and engines roaring around her.

Wings tilting the bulky flying war machine spun around and its turrets sights lined up on Blake's falling frame.

Blake snapped the Dust crystal in half and tossed half into the air before her and use the blur of an after-image to cover throwing the second half into the ocean.

Like a chainsaw the Bullhead filled the air with a deafening roar as it unleashed a hoard of bullets upon Blake's frame.
The Faunus swung her blade through the air and deflected as many shot as she could, each bullet crashing against Gambol Shroud with a clank that sent a sharp jarring pain through her arms. "Ahh!" Mini-guns, hurt! Finally the Red Dust crystal was struck and the sky was filled with a blistering red wave of fire.

Spinning in the air Blake fired down into the water, her Aura senses guiding her to the charged fragment of crystal she'd dropped below. After the bullet struck its mark the water below rose up in an explosive, hissing roar that sent steam and spouts of water surging into the sky.

Blake kicked herself off another after-image and torpedoed herself onto the shipping docks. Smashing against the cement Blake ignored the resounding cracks below her feet and shot off like a bullet. Smashing her way through around and over shipping crates, she cast Dust and torn steel to the air behind her before throwing herself to the ground and ducking into the warehouse sector. Behind her the sounds of police clambering in their cars and the Bullhead's twin jets roaring to full strength hit her ears.

After running the gamut through the docks, into warehouses and between the shipping crates Blake cut off from her run chaotic dash and shot towards the nearby fence. She was pleased to see only one confounded officer before her, they clearly hadn't expected her to get this far. Blake used her as a springboard, catapulting herself into the street and then she ran down the nearest alleyway.

'It won't matter if they try to follow me now, I'll be gone before they even get started,' Blake thought. As she vanished into the crowded streets of Vale, one shadow amongst thousands, Blake wondered, 'What am I going to do now?' No answer, no hope was forthcoming from the depths of her mind, and for the first time, in a long time, Blake was well and truly alone.

Chapter End Notes

So, I hope everyone who read this prologue enjoyed it, thanks to those who liked the initial idea and especially to Person With Many Aliases for the interest that convinced me that restarting this fic would be worth it and for simply being an awesome beta reader.

'The Knights Errant' is a 'what if' built around the idea of everyone in RWBY missing out on going to Beacon due to outside circumstances, but still managing to find one another. The prologue is basically establishing Blake's situation, initially she started on an airship and the police tried to be subtle about it but then the idea of her hiding in a Schnee Dust ship came to mind and this happened. I'm pleased as it gave me the chance to use Dust in what I hope is a creative manner and introduce a Hunter character, I doubt they'll become a recurring figure but he's based of a minor "The Batman" villain called Temblor who's fighting style and weapons seemed to fit RWBY pretty well.

So that's my nervous re-introduction of this idea, if anyone has any question, comments or critiques please feel free, I love feedback and it will help me improve!
Ruby Rose pulled her red hood tighter over her red-tipped brown hair as another wave of chilly air wafted over the deck of the ship, ruffling her crimson cloak as it passed. In truth she barely noticed the coll evening breeze or the choppy waters that rocked the small grey fishing barge. Ruby’s heavy black combat boots were clapping against the metal deck of the small ship as she practically skipped in place as she held onto the railing. "Oh this is going to be great!" She enthused, silver eyes darting around to the panting Corgi at her foot side.

For his part, Zwei tilted his head and yipped, rising up on his hind paws as he did so as if cheering. "I know, its been ages since we got to see Yang! I hope she's doing OK in Vale. I mean she said her new job was going well, so that's good, I just hope she's not working too hard," Ruby said in a hurried stream of consciousness.

Her good mood ruptured when a deep and familiar chuckle hit her ears. Looking to her left Ruby saw a brown haired boy with short box hair, square features and wearing a thick jumper and pants. He leaned up against the railing and looked at her with a cocky little smirk before saying, "Yeah, I'm sure your sister could find plenty of work in the city, maybe I'll look her up."

"Nothing, nothing," The boy said with an airy wave of his hands, "I'm sure your sister's working fine, it must be hard after that sad drunk and the your old man ran off, I-

Ruby's cloak flew up, rose petals whirling around her as she dragged Crescent Rose from its place on her back. The black and red steel almost looked like a giant club with an over-long red topped head on first inspection, but after a speedy wave of Aura was sent pulsing through it's frame Crescent Rose began to crank and whirr as it shifted into a giant black handled scythe almost twice as tall as its wielder. In an instant Ruby slammed the blade tip into the ships deck, sending a quiet thud through the floor, and she watched as the boy stepped back, reaching for a weapon at his side that he evidently left at home.

Running up to Crescent Rose's side Zwei let out a loud bark at the boy who stared between the two, eyes wide and an ugly scowl peeling back on his lips; silver eyes met blue before the boy blinked and sagged back, spitting over the side of the boat and shoving his hand into his pockets. He muttered something under his breath and marched towards the other side of the small boat and out of Ruby's sight.

"Hey!" The captain shouted from inside the glass cased control room behind Ruby. "Put that thing away!"

Gulping Ruby immediately flexed her Aura that sped out of finger tips like a shock-wave and called Crescent Rose back to its dormant state. She pulled her hood back up to hide her bush, and from a hunched over 'please don't look at me' stance, awkwardly waved at the captain and said,
"Sorry!"

"Arf?" Zwei barked confusedly as he sat down on his hindquarters and stared up at her with big dark eyes.

Ruby instinctively patted the corgi and a small smile came back to her lips and she said, "It was nothing Zwei, and look on the bright side, we'll be landing soon and Yang promised to take us out for Super Burgers!"

"Arf!" He yipped, back-flipping into the air and barking for joy as Ruby chuckled and returned to leaning over the railing and watching the water pass by as the wind ruffled her coat and skirt.

Yang Xaio Long held a thin yellow bike helmet on the tip of her right index finger, spinning it around in the air as she looked over the docks of Vale. The sun was setting out over the water giving the rippling tide a glittering gold effect that the blonde would admit she liked.

'But it doesn't make waiting any less boring!' She thought. Groaning, Yang leaned back against her beaten but well loved motorcycle, the yellow and black Bumblebee that sporadically squeaked and whined as she rocked back and forth on her white booted feet. Yang's groan became a curse as her Scroll began to vibrate; flicking the silver device open Yang scanned the projected screen and skimmed the messages contents.

(I need you to run some books to a friend of mine as a favour.

He's been a real pain about this and I can't leave work.

I left the box at your place remember?)

"Uuuh!" Yang groaned, casting her head back and staring at the orange sky, 'Junior I do not need this today!'

Just as she was about to text back and tell the man to get someone else to manage his dirty work a bark hit her ears; it was closely followed by a rush of air, rose petals, and a high pitched cry, "Yang!"

"Ruby!" Yang cheered, she threw out her arms and was nearly bowled over by her red hooded little sister as the smaller girl flung herself into Yang's open chest and wrapped her tiny arms around Yang's neck, dangling off of. Pulling the smaller girl into a tight embrace Yang stared down at Ruby who looked up at her with a sweet smile and wide silver eyes.

"Ooh I'm so happy to see you!" Ruby cheered.

"Me too Ruby, its been way too long," Yang said, a tightness in her chest loosening as she got a look at her younger sibling. Loosening her hold Yang rested her hands on Ruby's cheeks and brushed her fingers through the smaller girl's brown, red-tipped locks. "Was the trip OK? Have you been eating enough? No one's given you any trouble right?" She asked as gently as she could.

Ruby blew a stray lock of hair from her forehead and grinned as their pet corgi, Zwei, jumped between them with a yip and landed in her arms. "I've been fine Yang. Schools been pretty good, people are still asking about you though," She said with a little huff. "Some jerks were spreading rumours but I took care of that!" She said, proudly pumping her fist into the air.

Yang smothered a worried groan and settle for ruffling Ruby's hair. "You didn't get hurt right?" Yang knew there was a dangerous edge to her voice, but she didn't much care.
Ruby just grinned up at her and winked, "They couldn't even touch me!"

"And you didn't get in trouble?"

"It was just a sparring match, its not like I did anything bad!" She insisted, before mumbling in some mix of bashfulness and pride, "Just, you know, launched them out of the ring and through a window."

"You didn't have to do that Ruby, its not like I care what they think of me, or like they even know what they're talking about," Yang said.

"But it bothers me Yang," Ruby said. "Anyway can we get out of here? This place stinks of fish!"

She said, fumbling with Zwei as she tried to clasp her nose.

"Arf!" Zwei barked as if in ascent.

"All right you two lets get going," Yang said, tossing her sister a red helmet and sliding onto her bike. "I see you're wearing that dress I bought you," Yang noted. The dress being a mostly black affair with a corset on the outside and crimsons red lining that matched Ruby's hooded cape. Hidden beneath Ruby's red cloak Yang could see the edges of Ruby's beloved 'Crescent Rose' sticking out as Ruby slid onto the bike clutching Zwei in one arm.

"Yeah, of course," Ruby replied, as Yang revved up the engine Ruby wrapped her around Yang's waist and leaned forward to be heard over the rumble, "So who were you talking to before I got here?"

"Crap,' Yang thought as she sped away from the docks and back onto the crowded streets of Vale proper, warehouses quickly being replaced by pretty multi story and vibrantly coloured brickwork. Over the gathering winds Yang shouted, "Just someone I run packages for sometimes, it can wait!"

"So you're doing deliveries now!?" Ruby called.

"Yeah, plus some bodyguard and bouncer work, its pretty good money all things considered!" Yang answered, ignoring the rumbling of her Scroll.

"So shouldn't you answer your Scroll!? I don't want to get in the way!" Ruby shouted.

"Its fine, I said we'd spend the weekend together, he can find someone else to run his delivery!"

Yang ducked and weaved her bike between cars and shot through an orange hologram street light. Tires screeched as she shot into the drive-through at their favourite burger place and came to a stop behind another patrons car. The building itself was tall, with a flat baby blue second story, light brown bricks and lots of glass walls on the bottom and plants spread out around the almost claustrophobically tight drive through.

Ruby was still pressed into her back when said mumbled, "Will your boss be OK with that though? I don't want you to get in trouble because of me, I know how important your work is."

Yang hated the meekness in Ruby's voice, she loathed how her younger sister even needed to consider such thing and cursed that she was right. 'I really can't just let a job slide, if nothing else Junior will start screwing me on the pay again or stop hiring me all together!' And the last thing she needed was Hei Xiong undermining her chances of getting hired anywhere else, let alone cutting her pay, he'd been in the game long enough to withstand whatever backlash Yang might have for him and the man's network of contacts would likely be able to make Yang seem like poison for anyone who otherwise might have considered hiring her.
"Fine, fine," Yang said with a deliberately relaxed wave, "it is just a delivery run, we'll grab some dinner and then swing by my place and pick up the package or whatever," Yang relented. "It should only take about half an hour."

Ruby started frantically tapping at Yang's side as she edged her bike forward and next to the speakers. "Yang, you can just drop me at Dust till Dawn, the new 'Weapons!' magazine should be in now and I really, really want to read it!"

"May I take your order?" said the buzzy little plastic box shaped like a smiling burger with giant googly eyes.

Yang glanced over her shoulder and asked, "Think you can chow down on the back of Bumblebee?"

"Easy!" Ruby affirmed.

"May I take your order!?" The voice said again, this time accompanied by a violent crackle of static.

Yang answered, "Yeah, we'll take two super burger combos and a kids meal with cookies and no drinks!" Yang may have trusted Ruby to eat on the back of Bumblebee but trusting her, or Zwei, to not accidentally spill a drink on her pride and joy would be a bit much. Bumblebee had come along way from a broken down scrapper she'd pulled from the tip and practically rebuilt with second hand and scavenged parts and Yang did not want her damaged even on accident.

 Barely a minute later, fault Super Burgers customer all one wanted, no one would deny they put the 'fast' in fat food, Yang blasted out the drive through and back onto the streets. She had a burger hanging from her mouth and Ruby cheering as she and Zwei chowed down leaving a trail of cookie crumbs in the dust behind them.

When Yang drove into the storage locker lot she called home the blonde was minus one sister who was likely mooning over a new dynamic bullet casing in Dust Till Dawn. What Yang was not down however was a dog, both girls agreed that letting Zwei lose in a Dust shop was as much of a recipe for disaster now as it had ever been. Thus the black and white corgi had been plopped in Yang's lap for the duration of the trip, tongue lolling out as he enjoyed the strong winds and high speeds Yang relished.

Clicking off the engine Yang dismounted, boots dragging across the gravelly pavement; Zwei jumped from his perch on her seat and toddled after Yang as she grasped her bikes handled and began gently guiding it down the line of dark brick squares and metal shutters. Finally the little hanging sign reading fourteen came into view, giving off an annoyed squeak as the wind rustled it from its rest. 'Home sweet home,' Yang mused as she eyed up the delivery sitting before her. It was a decently sized box, easily three Zwei's wide and two high, covered in black wrapping paper and sealed with red string.

"Juniors calling card one of the most effective thief deterrents there is" Yang said to Zwei who was sniffing the box, marching around to each corner and inspecting it with a critical eye. The corgi didn't seem too excited by the contents so at least Junior wasn't having her ship drugs or Dust or something.

Unlocking the roller door Yang lifted the storage locker open just enough for Zwei to slip under inside. Looking down at the corgi Yang winked and said, "Watch the place while I'm gone OK? I don't think my client will like me taking along a passenger."

Squatting down before the corgi Yang scratched the dogs neck and said, "Come on buddy, it'll be like half and hour tops and we'll be back..." Yang had heard that line before... "I'm not going anywhere dangerous, I'll be back soon, OK?" Yang said more firmly.

Zwei's puppy eyes finally relented and the corgi barked, "Arf!" before charging into her Storage Locker, "There's some half finished chi-

"Ra-afr!" Zwei barked back, mouth evidentially full of chips.

"Well OK then," She said, grasping the parcel by its string and yanking it onto the back of Bumblebee. 'Hopefully this will be quick,' Yang mused, only to mutter a curse upon everyone of Junior's ancestors as her Scroll buzzed again. Saddling up on her bike Yang skimmed the message and snorted.

(This is kind of odd for him, see if there's anyone with him, he might have a new girlfriend.)

The hidden message was not lost on Yang, 'Great go to this Tukson's place, poke around and if I find anything run it straight to Junior. I hate all this cloak and daggers crap, he'd better be paying me well for-' Yang skimmed the price and her eyes widened, 'Well now! What's got you in a tizzy Junior?'

With the Lien signs running through her mind Yang revved the engine and skidded out of the lot and off towards Tukson's Book Trade.

Yang had not been to Tukson's Book Trade before, a fact Junior in his infinite wisdom must have forgotten because it took Yang significantly longer to find it than she'd ever expected. It was dark out and the girl was irritated beyond belief, not least of all because of how public the place was. Yang had done plenty of runs in the past but mostly to other clubs, bars or shoddy looking apartment blocks and warehouses, never looking inside the boxes, money being far too hard to come by that she couldn't risk getting called out by an employer. This meant she had not expected to find Tukson's Book Trade in one of the more humdrum and generally nice areas of Vale.

It was odd to think such a normal looking store could have a connection to Junior. But then, she hadn't known about money launders or or 'Banks' back when she first started, which she assumed Tukson was. His store was on a good sized block of land, the front was all dark brown panels and tempered glass with a white bricked second story and plants of all things hanging from the windows!

Slinging the box over her shoulder Yang strode into the dimly lit book store. All around her tomes lay scattered across shelves and tables like the owner spent every night furiously half reading every book before passing out and never bothering to actually finish.

"Tukson! Yo Tukson, you here!? I got a thing from Junior for you!" Yang shouted, sadly to no effect, the musty book shop remained dim and silent as a grave. Striding deeper into the man's store Yang dumped the box on the front counter and ambled through the swinging double door and into the back which was,underwhelming to say the least, Yang felt, being just another room with lots of book shelves tightly packed in about half a dozen rows.

"I heard you got a new girlfriend, that true?" She said, eyes scanning over the wide array of books and- Something moved- Yang threw herself left and through a pile of books on the floor, sending them flying as the sound of a blade cutting through air rang in her ears. Ember Celica whirred to
life on her wrists, gold bracelets shifting into two thick gold armbands, accompanied by a powerful click as the shotgun bullets were loaded.

A dark figure was on her in an instant, a black blade tore through the book in front Yang's face and shot towards her throat. Left hand tilting Yang squeezed the trigger and an explosion of Fire Dust shattered the floor and sent her spiralling to the side. Twisting around Yang brought her right fist up to blast her assailant but when her blow struck the dark haired woman's body scattered like smoke.

Slamming her hand into the floor Yang flung herself back to her feet and crossed her arms over her chest just in time to block an executioners swing with her bracelets. The two metals sparked and screeched as Yang's attacker pushed her katana down, the tip of her blade hovering just above Yang's head.

Yang's lilac eyes met two golden cat-like orbs and the blonde smirked. Aura running through her body fire ran through her veins and a faint outline of golden-red wavered around her frame as she threw the girl back and into the air without breaking her guard.

Dragging her fist back Yang readied for a quick volley, smirking as she cocked her left gauntlet for her opponents dodge and follow up, when a deep male voice shouted, "Stop, stop this!"

Tukson, a tall, broad, dark haired and mutton-chopped Faunus with a square face, a simple buttoned shirt and red vest shot between the duelling duo arms stretched wide. "Get back upstairs!" He roared and for the first time Yang noticed dark claws where nails should otherwise be along with fangs just a bit too large to be a humans.

Yang's eye's shot to the girl she'd been fighting, long dark hair flew behind her as she shot for the stairs. She hid what little of her face Yang could see behind her hand; the girls outfit was a white shirt with black leggings, shoes and sleeves. Idly Yang saw a second line of thick dark metal in the girls left hand, much thicker than the blade she'd tried to cleave Yang's head off with. 'For defence then? Heh, you're full of surprises lady.' Then, in a blur, the mystery woman was gone.

Looking back at Tukson and surveying the burnt and torn up books and crater in his back room Yang silently wondered if she was going to be taken down to the station again. 'Oh gods, please no, anything but having Ruby bail me out again!' "Look she attacked me first," Yang said quickly, holding up her hands and waving them at Tukson defensively.

Tukson looked ready to spit and scream in rage but he just let out a deep sigh through clenched teeth, nails buried deep in his palms. Finally he grunted and said, "Its fine, just get out of here, now, I'll tell my cousin not to attack the delivery girl again."

Eyebrows raised Yang strode back past the counter and said, "Hey no problem. Tell you're cousin or whatever if she wants to tussle again I can free up some time next week."

"Just go!" He barked.

"Gone." Yang answered, disappearing out the door and marching to Bumblebee. It was dark out but and Yang knew she needed to pick up Ruby but Junior was likely to pay extra for the info but could become a notorious tight ass when his employees weren't fast enough for his taste. 'Dust Till Dawn's a nice place, another half an hour wouldn't hurt would it?' She thought. Yang's head felt like a corkscrew as she contemplated her options before just pulling out her Scroll and texting Ruby.
Mind if I'm a bit late? Sorry, I got lost and need to run in somehting for my boss.

Yang rested on her bike and tapped her leather boot against the ground in growing worry and irritation as Ruby failed to respond. Finally her Scroll binged and the text read.

Take your time! I just found this awesome new magazine I never read before, the cover is really weird though!

Sighing Yang smiled and sent back a message.

Thanks Ruby, I'll pick you up soon and then tomorrow I'm gonna take you out for something awesome, someone's getting a bonus tonight!

And with that she flicked her Scroll shut and rode off down the darkening streets of Vale, holographic jade street lights providing her guiding path.

From a second story window above 'Tukson's Book Trade' a golden eye disappeared from the tiny crack in the curtains at the blondes departure.

Blake turned to the man standing behind her and said, "She's gone."

"Good, now you can go through all this," Tukson said, tossing the opened black box onto the hard wooden floor. Blake pulled the first layer of clothes from it and found a thick white scarf easily large and thick enough to hide half her face in. Below it she pulled out a billowing black buttoned-cloak that would hide most of her torso. Below that were more clothes and hidden within Blake knew she'd find fake IDs, maps and Dust.

"I'm sorry things got out of hand," Blake said quietly as she wrapped the scarf around her neck.

Tukson shrugged and muttered, "Its to be expected, Junior knows I'm reporting to somehting larger than him and this was an out of the blue order, I should have expected he'd send his Huntress. Now come down stairs and lets see if we can salvage some of my books, just because I'm leaving this place doesn't mean it has to be a mess for whoever takes over when I'm gone."

"Of course, and-"

"Don't thank me again," Tukson said as he marched down the steps, "You're helping me survive this as well after all."

Blake simply nodded and followed the older Faunus.

'I hope nothing else goes wrong tonight.'

In a brightly lit hotel suite a young woman with long white hair tied back in a right-side ponytail worked at a stately oak-wood desk lined with subtle in-scripted patterns and almost comically large for someone so young. Her sharp blue eyes were the picture of focus as she inspected her silver rapier and its cycling Dust-container for any flaws. She wore a simple blue nightgown and was practically surrounded by white boxes, each one marked by the Schnee family glyph.

The hotel room itself was perhaps only of middling size, lacquered hard wood floors, a mini fridge, bed side tables, a small tucked away cupboard surrounded by white walls lined with antique steel torches along with more modern lights up above. There was a queen sized bed bedecked in red and purple silks, surrounded by a veil that faced a large-scale hologram portraying the evening news.
Spinning in her chair Weiss Schnee brushed a stray lock of hair away from her scarred eye and toyed with a white tea tea-cup. Taking an experimental sip of the steaming liquid and sighing as she gulped it down and rubbed her neck with a free hand. Rising to her feet Weiss picked up the nearby remote and un-muted the news as Lisa Lavender, a silver haired woman in a black and purple pant-suit came on the air. Behind the reporter there was a picture of a dark haired girl with sharp golden eyes, black hair, matching bow and a grim set to what Weiss had at first thought of as soft features.

"News just in, the Vale Police Department have finally made an announcement regarding the events at the shipping docks three days ago."

Weiss's interest peaked, she recalled hearing about that just as her ship arrived. However all she knew was that a large collection of police and a Bullhead had been present around one of her families ships and that something had gone wrong. Given the docks were still standing and she'd heard no word of sudden and tragic loss of Dust or life she'd assumed it was a simply matter like a sinking ship.

Lisa Lavender motioned to the picture behind her and said, "This image is of one Blake Belladonna and a native of Atlas. She is now a known member of the notorious White Fang terrorist organisation and a wanted criminal with a three hundred thousand lien bounty on her head being offered by the councils of Vale and Atlas."

Weiss felt her delicate single finger grasp on her tea-cup straining at the mention of the White Fang. The nightmarish line of memories it brought about from cousins and family friends found dead and hanging in the streets to her fathers fury at the Faunus who dared strike at those who deemed close to him. The cup cracked in her hand but Weiss barely registered it, eyes straining as she stared at the screen and ground her teeth.

"Evidence uncovered by Atlas Specialist and testimony given by captured White Fang soldiers paint Belladonna as the instigator and Cell-leader in some of their most publicly destructive campaigns. These crimes range from the deaths of several SDC executives," The cup fell from Weiss's hand and fell to the floor with a crack. "Dozens of burned down Dust shops and the loss of a satellite outpost necessary for the continued function of the Cross Continental Transmit Towers. The police claim that Belladonna smuggled herself to Vale on a freighter after being chased out of Atlas by Atlesian Specialists. They attempted to capture her on the ship itself with the aid of a Huntsmen, however, her reckless use of Dust and the police's commitment to securing and ensuring the safety of the public in the case of Dust combustion allowed her to escape. She is currently presumed to be alone and highly dangerous to engage. The police believe she will try to create or align herself with local sympathisers to their White Fang's cause.

In light of this, the Chief of Police has promised to double patrols in neighbourhood where White Fang sympathisers are likely to appear and will be detaining several suspects for questioning. Additionally, all protests that might draw the White Fang's attention, such as tomorrow's 'Faunus Rights Rally' are cancelled," She said simply, though the subtle twist in her voice would have, at another time, given the heiress a sense that the reporter was holding herself back from sharing her true thought.

"Anyone with information on the fugitive are to contact local authorities and stay calm. Those who report accurate information will be offered a portion of the reward money," Lavender finished. As quick as it had come Belladonna's picture vanished to be replaced by a more cheery image of Beacon and the reporter smiled, in that very controlled very practised way that left what she actually felt a mystery. "In other news another year at Beacon is beginning tomorrow and we here at VNN have recently discovered that Weiss Schnee, musician and heiress to the SDC will be
joining dozens of other skilled youths at Beacon to commence her training as a Huntress in order to better guard humanity."

Weiss flicked the the TV off, marched over to her sword and dragged it from the desk leaving a deep scar on the surface as the Dust cylinder span and shone wildly. Weiss snarled as she burnt the name into her memory, 'Belladonna!'

Weiss pictured the White Fang before her and with a wild and savage thrust she tore her sword through the woman's throat.

"Hyaa!"

As one women contemplated her duties, another plotted her escape under the darkness of night and a third reflected on her losses and her fury, there was a fourth girl who was ensuring some young man was having a very bad night.

It really was the sort of night were it seemed nothing was to go right for anyone.

Such a thought was not far from what ran through Li's head as the red caped girl he was robbing exploded into rose petals and kicked him in the face, sending the man hurtling backwards and through a window where he went crashing into the pavement with a thud. The last sounds he heard was the whir of a transforming weapon, and then, he passed into unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

I hope anyone who reads this has enjoyed it and please feel free to leave questions, comments and critique I'm hoping to improve my writing.

Oh and of course, RWBY and all its characters, world and lore are the property of its owners and this is not done for profit. One chapter late won't call call the layers down on me... right?
Chapter 3 Heart to Heart

Ruby sat in a dark interrogation room, dark grey seemed to surround her on all sides barring a one way mirror off to her right. She sat at a small wooden tables, scrunching up her skirt in nervousness as a lamp shone a blinding light in her eyes that left her feeling like the sole focus of a thousand eyes. Professor Goodwitch, an amazingly strong Huntress with a riding crop and a cool purple cap marched around her in silence. The be-speckled blonde radiated the sort of disapproval only strict teachers and commanders could, which Ruby supposed fit with her school teacher-like outfit of white buttoned shirt and dark skirt. However no minute distraction made her any more comfortable.

'This isn't your first time in a police station Ruby, its OK, you didn't do anything wrong... Right?'

She thought to herself. 'Wait what if she knows I bailed Yang out that one time? But I paid and she didn't even do anything wrong and- wait is she still talking?'

"If it were up to me," Goodwitch said, her stern tone relaxing into something like a sigh as she came to a stop on the other side of the table from Ruby, "You'd be sent home with a pat on the back."

'Oh thank goodness,' Ruby thought, sighing and almost flopping down onto the table when something thin and black invaded her vision.

"Ah!" Ruby shot back as the riding crop cracked against the table and Goodwitch glowered at her before saying, "and a slap on the wrist."

Eyes wide Ruby stared up at the senior Huntress, her hands grasping for a weapon that rested on the other side of the room. Goodwitch just sighed again and said, "But as it stands, there is someone here who wants to speak with you."

And with that she stepped aside for a silver haired man with a dark cane, a green turtle neck suit, glasses and most importantly a tray of cookies. It was the living legend, Headmaster and founder of Beacon Academy, Ozpin.

"Good evening, would you care for a snack?" He asked.

Hei Xiong, or Junior as he was more commonly called, slammed his Scroll shut and repressed a groan of irritation as he slipped it into his pocket. The well dressed, if he did say so himself, bartender walked back behind the counter and ran a hand through his short dark hair as he eyed some of multi-coloured bottles lining the black shelves.

He drowned out the flashing red, white and yellow lights along with the music and joyful hoots of his clients with practised ease. 'At least this place is still running like its supposed to,' he thought. Grabbing a bottle of Mistrali whisky from the top shelf the information broker poured himself a tall glass of the brown liquid before turning to where Melani and Miltiade's stood. The white and red dressed girls respectively both glanced at him and Hei simply pointed at the door and then clasped his fist. Both girls immediately marched away to take up their spots at the giant steel double doors.

'Gods, the last the I need tonight would be Roman coming back on me for this,' He thought. The dark suited and red tied 'bouncers' all seemed to sense his mood and straightened up, keeping one hand on their weapons and and their eyes on the entrance. Throwing back the whiskey in a quick shot Junior let out a rough sigh as it burned down his throat. He half watched a report about
Beacon and the SDC heiress on the bars TV but mentally he was going over his resources. 'It may be time to upgrade,' He thought, a grimace spreading across his bearded face.

Seconds later an explosive boom resounded from the doors as one of them was cast open, "Yo Junior!" A young woman's voice called. Junior didn't need to look up to know it was Yang Xiao-long, so instead he just began snatching bottles from the bar behind him and mixing a drink. He was only drawn from his task once her gold bracelet covered wrists slapped down on the counter.

"Wow, what happened Junior? The clubs hopping but it looks like you're dropping," she said with some mirth.

Meeting the blonde's lilac eyes from behind his red visors Junior muttered, "None of your business, Xiao-Long."

"Oh don't be so grouchy," she cooed, spinning on the bar stool he got the full look at the girls outfit. It was somewhat conservative by her tastes he supposed, a buttoned white jacket with brown sleeves, short black pants and brown leather gloves. 'Certainly different than what she wore the first time we met,' he thought, unconsciously rubbing his shoulder, the wound had healed, his pride, not so much. But how the hell was he supposed to know she'd been fifteen?!

"Did you finish the job?" He finally asked, popping down a Strawberry Sunrise with one of those umbrellas she always asked for.

"You remembered!" Yang cheered, sculling the drink in one happy gulp before slamming the empty glass back on the counter. "Anyway yeah, jobs done, I'm sure Tukson or whatever will be real happy with that heavy box of books I dropped off."

"Notice anything odd?" he pressed as she swirled the ice in her drink and smirked at him with a half lidded gaze.

"Something, something, maybe, how much do you owe me?" She asked.

Hei reached beneath the bar and slid the back of his wrist over the Safe's scanner. With a quick beep it popped open and the crime-boss grasped a small wad of Lien and held it up in-front of the blond, leaning himself back and just out of her reach.

Yang made a lazy grabbing motion before chuckling and resting her arms on the bar. "I gotta wonder why you're paying so much for info on this guy," She said calmly. Hei just shook his head and he was pleased to see the blonde relent with a dismissive little huff before she said, "Fine, fine, try acting mysterious all you want. As to what's weird about this guy he had a girl staying with him, might have been family given the hair but I can't say. He's a Faunus and I think she had cat eyes if that helps, long dark hair, wore lots of black and she fought like some super ninja woman."

"Could you take her?" Hei asked, not too quickly and not too slowly as he quickly went over a list of candidates that fit the new girl's description. He did not like the answer he came up with. 'If its who I think it is then having Xiao-Long around could be a blessing,' He thought.

Yang just shrugged and said, "I'd give her a go but can't say for sure, heh. She's stronger than the twins though, and a bit faster than me, not nearly as strong though and I think I have some of her style pegged." Report seemingly done, Yang looked at the glass with a raised eyebrow as he took it and said, "So where's Li? Normally he does these and I can't say his are as good."

"In a cell," Junior snapped, his mood worsening as he mixed up the drink far too quickly for his own taste and passed the refill back to the blonde.
"Seriously!? Wow no wonder you're so grouchy, what happened?" She asked as she began nursing her drink.

"Roman Torchwick hired some of the troopers for a job, things didn't go as planned," Hei said.

Yang wrinkled her nose at the mention of the man and said, "You only keep the finest of company don't you Junior?"

"That would explain why I'm talking to you, wouldn't it?" He retorted.

Placing a hand over her heart in mock offence Yang gasped and said, "Really Junior, how can you be so cruel? I'm charming, Roman's meant to be a whole different league of mean. What are you doing dealing with him anyway?"

"That's above your pay-grade Xiao-long," Junior answered.

The two gazed at each other for a moment before Yang shrugged; sending him a cocky smirk she asked, "Speaking of pay?"

"Yeah, yeah, job well done and all that," He said. The information broker flicked through a dozen or so bills and passed them over to his nominal employee.

Yang frowned, holding the money flat in her palm as if weighing it and said, "You're coming up a bit light here Junior."

"Consider it me pre-paying myself for this bit of information. My boys who got taken in, there was someone else dragged to the station with them," He said, leaning over the bar and closer towards Yang. "If I recall what Li said over the phone it was a small girl, brownish red hair, red cape, and a 'big fucking scythe' in his own word-urk!" Junior saw the world in a blur as Yang's burning hot finger clasped around his neck and dragged him into the air in a flash.

"What the fuck happened to Ruby Junior!?!" Yang shouted. She was standing on the bar to compensate for the height difference and Juniors legs dangled and kicked in the air.

"I only heard like ten minutes ago! There was a Huntress, she took your sister to the station, that's all I know!" He gasped out.

"Rrra!" Yang roared, hurling him into the wall the blonde dropped off the table and barrelled past his guards and out the door. She shouted over her shoulder, "News about Ruby should have been the first thing out of your mouth Junior!"

Staggering to his feet the barman wheezed and rubbed his throat. "I'll keep that in mind for next time," He gasped. Hei placed his hands on the bar and saw the last of the money he'd kept for himself had also been taken, probably for to pay Ruby's bale. "Ah dammit," he bit out.

Tonight was just not his night.

"You really want to come to my school?" Professor Ozpin asked simply.

Ruby leaned forward and answered, "More than anything in the world."

The silver haired headmaster smiled and looked to his fellow Hunter, Goodwitch, who just rolled her her eyes. "Well all right," he said with an amused sort of inflection as he leaned back in his chair. Behind him Glynda Goodwitch sighed and Ruby found herself frozen in place, eyes wide
and too stunned to react.

"But- I- I mean I'm too young aren't I?" She choked.

"Well yes, but I think we can make an exception to the rule, you wouldn't be the first," Ozpin said.

Ruby's mind flashed with images of Beacon's grand silver towers, state of the arts lecture halls, resources and all the explosive Grim filled missions she'd get to go own two years earlier than she'd ever have guessed! Then visions of her sister swam through Ruby's mind. The late nights waiting up together, hushed conversations and her protective hold, even that 'visit' from the police. 'Ever since Uncle Qrow vanished...' She thought.

"Professor Ozpin, can my sister come to Beacon too? Her names Yang, Yang Xiao-long, she's the right age and I swear she's a super good Huntress and really strong and nice and-" She stalled as Professor Goodwitch held up a hand to stop her.

"If I am not mistaken Miss Rose, Yang Xiao-Long already has a form of employment," Said the woman in a no nonsense voice. Pushing her spectacles up her nose Goodwitch continued, "She also left Signal before graduating and," she stressed, just as it appeared Professor Ozpin was going to open his mouth, "Someone with a criminal record cannot be allowed into Beacon."

Ruby shot to her feet, her fists slammed against the table with a thud that made it screech against the floor as she shouted, "My sister is not a crook!" only to cover her mouth and gasp upon realizing what she'd just done.

"I am sure your sister is a good woman Ruby," Professor Ozpin said. "I am also certain that given time your sister could make a fine Huntress. However, due to circumstances beyond even my control allowing her to attend Beacon is not within my power." His words were smooth, persuasive and utterly failed to make Ruby feel any better.

Eyes quivering as she hastily blinked away some gathering tears, 'Its not fair, none of its fair, all of that only happened because she was trying to help me!' Ruby thought. But then she'd made that argument in the past and had received, at best, condescension for her loyalty to Yang. Looking down at the grey table she sucked in a breath and sighed, "Thank you for the offer Professor Ozpin. I'm grateful I really am but... Yang always wanted to attend Beacon as well and I know she deserves to get in," she said firmly.

Shoulder drooping Ruby continued, "I just don't think I can say yes."

"Are you certain? I'm sure your sister would support you and I have confidence she could find work as a Huntress even without our qualification," Professor Ozpin reasoned.

"She would support me and that's would make it worse. There's no point in saying I want to be a hero and help people if I can't even help my own sister right?" She bowed her head and said, "Thanks, but no thanks Professor, I'll find my own way."

After that their exchange was awkward, at least to Ruby; Professor Ozpin accepted, Professor Goodwitch sent her a... Ruby couldn't identify the look, was it respect, disappointment, sympathy or something else? In the end it didn't matter, her course was set and the two educators escorted her out down a sterile, white and brightly lit hallway.

They passed a hologram displaying a girl about Yang's age with black hair with a matching bow on top along with a black and white outfit that made Ruby think of it as an almost skin tight butlers
suit. She had a heavy looking black broad cleaver in hand which shifted into a katana and then a pistol and Kusari-gama, connected by a thick black strip of cloth. If Ruby wasn't mistaken she'd have said it was a Variant Ballistic Chain Scythe except bound by some black material instead of a chain. The words 'Wanted' in bold red letters hung above her head and the White Fang terrorist groups symbol at her side made no secret as to why that might be the case. Though Ruby couldn't see any identifiable Faunus traits on the girl; she only even saw her name on the bottom of the screen, 'Blake Belladonna' it read, Ruby felt it was a shame, the girl seemed like she had kind eyes.

Just as they passed the other wanted displays including one for the red-headed man she'd fought earlier Ruby heard her sisters voice, rough and loud as it echoed through the station.

"What did she do to warrant an interrogation room!?"

"Yang!" She shouted, slipping away from the professors Ruby shot around the corner and saw Yang in a truly impressive rage. Her hair was a glowing golden mass of energy that pulsed with life and radiated heat. Her eyes shone red like a Grim's and she seemed to stand taller than every cowed officer in the foyer as she leaned over a moustachioed man at the massive curved front desk. All the officers either had weapons drawn or looked ready to run.

Looking up at the sound of her voice Yang whispered, "Ruby?" The younger girl blushed a little and waved awkwardly as the rage left her sister. Hair and eyes returning to normal Yang rushed forward in a blur and buried her in a hug followed by a very sudden pat down. "Are you OK, did they hurt you, did anyone so much as lay a finger on you?" She whispered.

"I'm fine, really, they just had some questions," Ruby tried to say.

"I'm afraid this is our fault miss Xiao-long," Professor Ozpin cut in. "Ruby quite heroically stepped in to protect a store from robbery earlier tonight and we simply wanted to hear her side of the story." Ruby did not miss how Yang moved to try and position herself between her younger sister and the two Beacon staff members.

"Is this true?" Yang asked, glancing over her shoulder.

"Yes Yang, they just had some questions for me nothing else, its fine. Professor Goodwitch was really cool when she fought this woman who shot fire," Ruby answered.

"We actually had an offer for your sister as well," Professor Ozpin said and Ruby suddenly felt herself choking on her words.

"Offer?" Yang asked, the tension gone from her voice she now sounded... intrigued and an intrigued Yang had a tendency to get whatever she wanted no matter what stood in her way.

"Indeed," Professor Ozpin nodded. "We offered a scholarship to Beacon Academy, though I am sad to say Ruby has chosen not to join us at this time," The grey haired man explained.

'Why did he mention that!?' Ruby inwardly despaired as Yang turned around to look her in the eyes. "I was, going to mention that once we were home..." she tried.

Frowning Yang spun around again and said, "She accepts."

"No I don't! Not unless you can come," Ruby answered instantly.

"Don't force me drag you Ruby," Yang said, sighing in frustration.
"Even if you did I'd just fail the entrance exam on purpose," Ruby countered, crossing her arms and trying to match her sisters frown.

Pinching the bridge of her nose Yang muttered, "We'll talk about this later."

Ruby looked around the room where they had become the centre of attention and she had the sudden urge to hide beneath her capes hood.

For her part Yang strode up to Ozpin and said, "Thanks for the offer. Are you willing to wait while I try and straighten this out with her?"

"Of course, though the airship to Beacon leaves tomorrow at ten. Please feel free to contact me any time between now and then if you have any questions," he answered. Pulling a card from his pocket he passed it to Yang and as she slid it into her jackets side pocket, he added, "In fact, please feel free to call any time if you feel you have good cause, I can be very understanding." his words had a strange sort of weight to them, like there was a dozen veiled meaning behind them.

"Thanks, I'll keep it in mind if I ever run into anything you need to know," Yang said in a very similar, but much more guarded tone. With that she turned around and threw her arms around Ruby and guided her out of the police station. "Come on, I brought bumblebee so get ready for a bad case of helmet hair."

Despite her sisters neutral tone Ruby got the distinct impression they were going to have a rather heavy talk when they got home. But rather than worry she just wrapped her arms around Yang's waist as her sister revved up the battered yellow bike she'd gotten from who knew where. Ruby tried to return Professor Ozpin's wave as they sped off and then she rested her head against Yang's back.

'Maybe I need to leave Signal as well, its not fair for you to bear all this weight alone;' She thought.

"Arf!" The excitable barking of Zwei greeted the two sisters as Yang pulled into the storage locker. The corgi did a little flip when the grey garage door opened with its customary rattle and he was quickly bundled up in Ruby's arms, licking her cheeks as she cuddled the canine and giggled.

"Did you guard the place while we were gone?" Ruby cooed.

"Arf!" The dog replied proudly. Yang's storage locked and home was small, only having a case of clothes and other supplies, her bike and a mattress all pressed up tightly against the brick walls. She didn't have much, but Ruby wouldn't put it past someone to try and rob her sister while she was out, the Fire Dust caps alone were likely enough incentive. In such times it was good to have a loyal hound like Zwei, for more than just his cuteness.

"Good boy!" She said, rubbing the excitable dogs belly as Yang leaned Bumblebee up against the wall.

"Need a drink Ruby?" Yang asked as she circled around the girl and dog, patting Zwei's head as she passed.

Ruby knew Yang was buttering her up for their inevitable talk but those cookies had left her throat a bit dry, "Sure, thanks Yang!"

"Hey no problem!" Her sister said with a wave as she disappeared out the door.
"Oh you should have seen me tonight Zwei!" Ruby exclaimed. The dog tilted his head as if beckoning her to continue and the Huntress in training was more than happy to oblige, "There were these guys, and they all wore dark suits and-!

The side of Yang's fist collided with the storage lockers 'Schnee Cola' vending machine with a bang. The dispensers lights flickered and buzzed as two blue cans rolled out. Slipping one can under her arm Yang cracked open the top of her drink, tilting it away from her as a spray of soda hit the asphalt.

The blonde could see the lights of her temporary home illuminating the otherwise dark location. Tiny dark boxed buildings lined each side of the miniature 'street' she walked upon, all about the size of a medium sized room. There were, Yang would admit, worse places to to live and she was hardly the only 'tenant'.

'But that doesn't mean I want Ruby to have to live here or stay with Zwei on Patch,' Yang thought. Beacon would have been perfect for her, a few solid years of free food, tuition, and access to everything her younger sister had ever dreamed! 'Of course she knows that, its just convincing her to go that's the issue.' The fact was though Ruby wasn't a fool; she'd been able to make the connection between Uncle Qrow vanishing for 'work' and dad disappearing soon after. She'd put together 'why' Yang stopped going to classes and bounced between Patch and Vale, usually coming back with money that founds its way into who knew how many people's hands. 'And she definitely knows I caused that property damage, I never was good at subtle fighting.' Yang thought.

Yet her little sister still trusted her, still admired her and fully believed she was a good person, and Yang tried her best to always live up to that, to be worthy of it. She couldn't say whether she'd succeeded but... she tried. The only people she'd ever hurt, not all that seriously as well, were crooked. Any damage she caused was around places like Juniors, and she never took a job she had reason to believe would end in innocent people getting harmed. Suffice to say it had made her system of odd jobs from the likes of Junior and others like him tricky, but in the end there was pretty much always a demand for someone who could take or deal out a punch and fight with flare.

'But I still screwed up didn't I?' She thought, teeth gnashing at the thought of a two bit con artist who could use Aura dragging their fight into the streets. 'I wasn't even there to fight you asshole!' She thought, rather pointlessly now.

Yang shook her head and tried to brush of memories of the past, any frustration she felt was inconsequential next to Ruby's situation. Beacon might have been a shared goal but Ruby was the one with heroic aspirations, she was the hero, 'I'm just a thrill seeker,' Yang reflected. Her grimace turned into a more genuine smile as she overheard Ruby re-telling her battle to Zwei who barked at all the right moments. Judging by her sister shadow she was even acting out her moves.

Ruby's rather impressive, if she said so herself, impersonation of the thief's evil cackle came to an abrupt halt as Yang returned.

"Regaling Zwei without me, how could you?" Yang japed.

"It was practice, now I can tell you both the full version with all the kinks worked out!" Ruby claimed. Her sister chuckled and slid the garage door down with a clang and tossed her a mint cola. "Thanks Yang!" She answered, dropping down Ruby sat back against the mattress and sighed as she reached for the tab.

"Don't open it too-"
"Ah!" Ruby screamed as a jet of Schnee cola shot up her nostrils and causing her to fling the can into the air.

"-Fast," Yang finished. "Hang on Ruby let met get you a cloth," The blonde said more hurriedly as Ruby sneezed.

"A-choo! You hit the- Choo!- machine again didn't you?" She said awkwardly.

"Sorry sis," Yang said quietly as she crouched down before her younger sister. Yang dispensed a small gob of water from a bottle onto a white cloth and began to gently dab at Ruby's face.

"Arf!" Zwei barked, and both girls turned to see the dog balancing a now empty Schnee cola can on his nose and lapping at the last few drops.

"Well there goes my drink," Ruby mumbled as Yang wiped the last bit of soda from her cheeks.

"Here have mine," The blonde interjected, pushing her own can towards her sister and shaking it to show it was still full.

"No that's fine, its yours," Ruby answered.

"I insist," Yang retorted. Off to the side Zwei's head tilted back and forth at the two girls exchange.

"Halfsies?" Ruby suggested, an impish smile spreading across her face as Yang caught her meaning.

The older girl groaned and rested her face in her free hand. "You should take it, this isn't an opportunity that might ever come around again," Yang said.

"I know, but there's no point if you don't get to have any," Ruby said simply.

Yang could only groan at that, "I don't want you to miss out on something just because of me Ruby."

"Its just a drink Yang, I can always have water," Ruby reasoned, knowing they were both dancing around the subject.

"Arf!" Zwei intruded, running around in tiny circles on the cement floor.

"He's going to be up all night isn't he?" Yang said.

"Probably."

"Arf!"

Yang slapped her forehead and groaned before putting down her drink, dropping to her knees and looking Ruby dead in the eyes. "All right Ruby, real talk, right now you have a chance to go to Beacon, probably the best school for Huntresses ever. You've wanted to go for years, you've wanted to be a Huntress since you were a little girl and you can get in two years early, this is the sort of chance people would kill for!"

Not meeting her sisters eyes Ruby tapped the tips of her fingers together and mumbled, "I'm not sure they'd let someone in if they killed somebody for it."

"Ruby I actually want us to discuss this," Yang said, not exactly seething but her words certainly were drawn out.
"What's there to discuss, I don't wanna go if you're not with me!" Ruby shouted. Yang and Zwei both leaned back, Ruby pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapped her arms around herself and muttered, "Its not fair. Ever since Uncle Qrow and dad disappeared you've been taking care of everything. The house, the food, the money, Zwei, me... Its not fair and you shouldn't be punished for that, for me."

"Oh Ruby," Yang hushed, rubbing her sisters arms Yang pulled her into a hug and gently stroked her hair and she felt Ruby slowly relax and go limp against her frame.

"Arruu," Zwei murmured, trundling up top Ruby and plopping into her lap. Barely concentrating Ruby idly stroked the dog and said, "Besides its not like I need Beacon to become a Huntress. I can always just finish Signal, or just start working now, we could be a team, you, me and Zwei! Plus it'd be easier than meeting new people, hehe..." Ruby trailed off as Yang seemed to tense slightly, the gentle thump of her heart rising in tempo and her skin radiating just a bit more heat than normal. 'Aura?'

"Ruby," Yang started, her words rough but quiet, "I don't want you sacrificing yourself, your dream or your future for me."

"How is that any different than what you're doing by sending me to Beacon?" Ruby retorted numbly.

Yang shook but only for a second before she pushed Ruby back and clasped her shoulders. "Ruby.... Ruby you do know we'd almost never have been able to attend together anyway right?"

"I know," Ruby sighed, "But you'd still be there if things weren't so... messed up," her eyes shot down again. "I wouldn't be alone, the house wouldn't be empty, we'd still-"

Yang cradled Ruby's cheeks and pressed their foreheads together, lilac eyes met silver and Yang spoke, "You wouldn't be alone if you went there now. Ruby you could make friends, I'd visit, I'd bring Zwei, we'll go to Patch together and in my off time I'll take care of the house. Ruby if you go everything will be easier and you'll be on your way!"

"But I don't have to be a burden, I can help you now!"

Yang pulled back and shook her head before saying, "Ruby, Beacon was always just a side thing for me, an option, I will be fine as I am and its not like I've got no options." Closing her eyes Yang sighed and rallied herself before once again staring at Ruby intensely. "There is no one on this world I love more than you, everything I do is because I care about you and want what's best for you Ruby, and this is best for you, please," She said, gently shaking Ruby by the shoulders, "Let me help you. If I can't... Why did I even bother trying?"

"Yang..." Ruby whispered as her sister pulled her in close again and this time she wrapped her arms around her.

"Please Ruby, I'm begging you, just do this for me."

"I..." Ruby knew her mind was made up, her guilt, her fear, her desire, all were lost under the wave of Yang's plea and yet she still stalled. "Can I sleep on it?" She said, pressing herself deeper into Yang's hug and cherishing the older girls warmth.

Yang bundled her, and Zwei, up in her arms and leaned against the wall and draped a simple brown blanket over the three of them. She kissed Ruby on the head and whispered, "I'll see you off tomorrow morning, I'll call you every day until your sick of my voice-"
"Never happen," Ruby retorted tiredly.

"And I will be there waiting for you when you get back... As the most awesome decorated Huntress you ever saw and then... We'll go back to Patch together, and go on missions together when we're older. I promise, I'll always be there for you, no matter what it takes."

'I just wish you'd let me be there for you...' Ruby thought. But she relented and welcomed the dark embrace of sleep enshrouded in a cocoon of warmth.

She had a big day tomorrow, more-so than she'd ever expected.
Chapter 4 Chance Encounter - Seize the Day!

One advantage to being a Faunus Blake had always appreciated was the ability to read in the dark. The former White Fang operative was nestled up against a plain white wall on Tukson's second story with a book in hand. She was currently engrossed in a copy of 'The Thief and the Butcher'. It was a rather grim story but she'd always fund the prose a pleasure to read.

Another advantage to being a Faunus, at least of Blake's type, was very sensitive hearing. Black cat ears twitched atop her head as the few sounds of Vale's early morning streets slipped through the door and Tukson's footfalls resounded in her senses. In an instant Blake was sliding across the floorboards, Gambol Shroud in hand as she came to rest behind the dark wooden door.

She pressed herself up against the wall, ears stretching and straining as she searched for a second set of foot steps. The door handle quivered and Tukson pushed it open with a squeak and strolled into her room with nary a pause. Blake scanned the hallway through the minute crack in the door and saw no one else in her safe-house.

"I'm alone," Tukson said, his tone thick as if he was repressing a sigh.

"Can't blame me for being cautious," Blake said as the man leaned up against the wall, slipping his hands into his pockets and staring at her with sunken, tired eyes.

Leaning his head back Tukson closed his eyes and said, "No I suppose not, and before you ask, I have... news."

"Just, news?"

"Can't exactly call it good, but its not necessarily all bad either," Tukson said. Opening his eyes the trader slapped his palms together and stepped up like a soldier ready to give a field report. "We're being withdrawn, or at least the majority of our fighting force is, the recruiters and some others are sticking around to lay the groundwork for whatever comes next."

"What comes next, and why now, why like this?" Blake asked.

Tukson shrugged, "No idea, Commander Rex sounded pretty steamed though, she seems to think Adam's getting too big for his breaches. Still this order comes from up top, she's being transferred to Mistral with some of her soldiers. Originally," Tukson said, stressing the word, "It was just meant to be Rex and her lieutenants but since your failed capture kicked up so much fuss we're going to ground for awhile. From here on every things going to be handled by Adam's lieutenant and some new "ally" we've got." The Faunus glanced to the side, lips thinning, Tukson looked like he wanted to spit as her glared at the bare wall.

"And who is this new ally?" Blake asked, almost hissing. 'Could it have been that girl, or someone she worked for? Was it her idea I be outed to the public?!'

"No solid word yet but if its who I think it is I'm not surprised they'd call Rex back in favour of someone less... contentious," Tukson said. He met her gaze for a moment before shrugging and finally said, "I think its Roman Torchwick."

"The criminal!?" Blake shouted. "Why would we ever work with someone like that? He's a wanted man! He's, he's filth!" Blake spat. Torchwick's reputation and litany of crimes was just one of the things she'd studied up on since coming to Vale. That the White Fang, an army for liberation and revolution would ally with him... It should have been impossible.
"We are criminals, remember?" Tukson said, half grumbling half sarcastically.

"That's besides the point and you know it," Blake said, grunting as she threw herself back against the wall.

"Yeah well, some damn funny things have been happening since you left, and it wasn't exactly a dream before," Tukson said.

"We need to find out what's going on," Blake said.

"Excuse me? What we need, is to get out of here, sooner rather than later. The police might have clamped down but there are plenty of ways out of Vale, and we already have our path into Vacuo."

"So we're just going to let this lie?" Blake practically hissed.

"That was always the plan, our old friends sinking lower just means we should get out faster," Tukson said. Looking away he rubbed his eyes and groaned, "Just get some sleep Blake, I'll take over watch and we can talk about this is the morning."

Relenting Blake nodded, she barely registered it as Tukson left the room. Blake marched across the floor and propped herself up next to the window and peaked through the cracks, her mind a maelstrom of conflict.

'Just go ahead and run, its all you're good at,' A traitorous part of her said, Blake simply wrapped herself in a loose blanket and pulled it taught around herself as she pressed deeper into the corner, unable to retort.

When morning came Ruby found herself gently jostled awake by Yang and a cornucopia of fine scents. After rubbing her eyes and placing Zwei to the side the young girl had been treated to breakfast in bed by her grinning sister. What Yang had arranged for Ruby was easily all of her favourite things on one tray, chocolate chip cookies on one plate, fresh strawberries stacked high with chocolate syrup, hot coco and even ice cream!

Yang had apparently been out since sun rose putting the meal together. "The ship leaves kind of early and what better way to start your day than with your favourites!" Yang had claimed while wearing a massive grin. After which the blonde had dropped down at Ruby's side and they'd spent the morning watching shows together on Ruby's scroll and just enjoying one another's presence.

Sadly it wasn't long before Yang dragged Ruby off to a nearby place for a shower, standing guard the entire time, and then Ruby found herself bundled up on Bumblebee and the two were careening off to the airship docks. Ruby hiding a cheeky grin at the secret 'package' she'd snuck into her massive green camping bag.

"Woah!" Ruby gasped, neck straining as she stared up at the sight of Beacon's personal airship. 'I'd seen pictures but this is so much more amazingly awesome!' Ruby thought, squealing under her breath and practically drooling at the magnificent sight of engineering.

The ships main body resembled a giant cylinder but with the bottom and top sides flattened out for landing purposes and to allow Hunters to stand on the 'deck' and engage Grim. The head of the ship had thick black armour that curved around the head and served as a battering ram when needed. Four gigantic wings, easily several times longer and wider than a car were folded up at the ships side like a bird. Ruby knew that once the gravity Dust ignited the ship would begin to float and those wings would propel it through the air like a fishes fins in the sea. Five glowing nozzles
sat at the back of the airship ready to provide for any high speed manoeuvres the ship might need should it be engaged in an escape or an assault which was when the wings would either be folded in for increased speed or used for maintain stability and control. Next to the smaller front set of silver and black wings was a set of stairs with a massive collection of colourfully outfitted Beacon students clustering around it.

"All right, off you get," Yang said cheerfully as she slipped of Bumblebee.

Distraction lost Rub nodded, suppressing a rising tension in her throat that pressed up against her Adam's apple and stung; she hopped off the bike, her heart tightening, chest feeling simultaneously like an empty chasm and like she was being crushed by her own rib cage. A small shiver ran through her body at the weight of the bags in her hands and the ship in the distance. 'We were meant to spend the week together and now I'm leaving her... I'm leaving home,' It was a cold, kind of tingly feeling, like her Aura enshrouded her frame keeping everyone away from her.

"Hey, its gonna be OK," Yang said, cutting through the wave of self imposed isolation and doubt. Her sister slipped her hands into Ruby's own and squeezed, the faint sense of her Aura blazing like the most comforting summer sun.

"You keep saying that, and I'm going but..." Ruby said, clasping Yang's hands tighter as her head drooped, hair tumbling over her face, hiding the wide world outside and reducing her vision to naught but the white cement pavement and her combat boots.

"Hey come on," Yang said gently, freeing one hand she tilted Ruby's head up to meet her eyes and said, "This was your dream Ruby, more than anything else and I'm glad I can be here to see it all come true." Ruby sucked in a breath and gulped as memories of Yang's voice took on an a lyrical tone as she spoke. "You don't need to worry about anything, I'll make sure you have everything you need, and if you ever need me I'll be at your side. So don't worry, don't cry, and just remember that no matter what I love you, and you time at Beacon will fly."

Ruby flew forward and wrapped her arms around Yang who returned her embrace and gently cradled her head.

"Thanks Yang, but I'm still gonna miss you," Ruby mumbled into her sisters shoulder. She felt Yang's frame shake, only for the older girl to chuckle, Ruby looked up into Yang's lilac eyes her head tilting in confusion.

"I'd be pretty disappointed if you didn't!" Yang said guffawed. She gestured out to the crowd of students with one arm and in a more gentle tone said, "But try to reach out, everyone there is a potential friend you just haven't spoken to yet, grab opportunities when you see-em and become the best hero you can be. Deal?"

"Deal," Ruby said, pulling back and flattening out her combat-skirt, a long held nervous tell and a bad sign, in part because she felt Zwei beginning to move and roll within her bag. 'New people could be nice but I'm sure Headmaster Ozpin won't mind if I bring Zwei... right?'

"Something wrong?" Yang asked, tilting her head to the side and blinking in confusion.

"Oh, yeah, fine, fine, just, you know, jitters," Ruby said. She was not a girl accustomed to lying so it was fortunate that what she said was true, from a certain point of view. Glancing at Yang's brown hip-pouches resting on either side of her dark biker shorts Ruby noticed her sisters scroll poking up and thanked good luck for the sudden spark of inspiration. "Yang do you have a job today?"
"Hm?!" Yang answered, eyebrows shooting up. "Why am I beeping?"

"No, no," Ruby said, smiling a little, "Just, I don't know, you look... work ready?"

"Heh, I always dress to impress so I'm a bit shocked you noticed," Yang said, arms swinging out to the side as if to show off her outfit before the blondes eyes flickered away from Ruby's own. Rubbing neck, well scarf Ruby thought, Yang said, "But... yeah I have an appointment, normally I'd cancel it but-"

"Then go," Ruby said, perhaps a little too forcefully. "I, uh mean if its important I don't want to keep you and... well I should probably mi- mu- me..."

"Mingle?" Yang guessed, ruffling Ruby's hair before resting her hands on her hips.

"Yeah that exciting, exciting word," Ruby said as cheerfully as she could, the words tapering off into a mumble. In her bag Zwei continued to rouse, pawing a little at the confines but for the moment staying silent.

"Are you sure?" Yang plied.

"Yeah," Ruby said, casting her eyes over her shoulder, "I need to get used to all this anyway," Ruby continued with a vague wave. "I'll be fine, I'll call once I get there and update you on everything. Besides," She added with a grin, "I bet some of the other students have cool weapons!"

"Haha, all right, I do need to get going, now the ship leaves in half an hour so don't stress, but remember what happens if I hear you skipped out," Yang said, never losing her cocksure grin.

Ruby went comically limp and said, "You'll carry me to Beacon over your shoulder and put me on Ozpin's doorstep."

"And that's if I'm in a good mood," Yang said, booping Ruby's nose.

"Hey!" Ruby said, trying to knock away her sisters finger like it was a fly only to find herself pulled into another, almost suffocating, hug.

"I'm so proud of you," She said softly.

"Thank you Yang, for everything," Ruby said.

Pulling apart Yang flared her brown vest and cheerfully said, "All right, enough mushy stuff! I'll be hearing from you soon and chances are you'll be sick of me by the end of this week!"

"I'll take that bet!" Ruby retorted as Yang jumped back on Bumblebee and with a salute and a wink sped off into the distance and leaving a trail of skid marks behind her.

Ruby waved her sister off and sighed with relief as Zwei popped out the back of her bag and barked straight in her ears. "Thanks for being quiet Zwei," she said rubbing her heads against the corgi's. Scratching her dogs ears Ruby spun around and sucked in a deep breath, she pushed any sense of guilt to the back of her mind were it could gather dust and instead eyed the crowd with a gathering sense of nervousness and resigned frustration. "Its not like I have to go up now you know, I mean, I'll see their weapons and stuff in sparring practice so I can wait here," She reasoned.

"Arf!" Zwei barked.

"Yeah, exactly, there's no need to rush this, or to go to Beacon really. I mean, I could have joined
the regulars, or even started a delivery company and practice by running between cars, 'Ruby Express! We get your package to you even if we have to cut down Grim!'" Ruby enthused, clenching her fists as if to stop the idea from escaping into the air.

"Arf!"

Ruby's entire frame sagged and muttered, "Yeah that sounds like a lot of work and I think I'm too young to start a business anyway... Uuh!" Ruby groaned as she very slowly began to slide towards the throng of students. "OK, just friends you haven't met yet, friends you haven't met yet. Zwei, do you think they'll treat me weird because I'm younger?"

"Arf!"

"Oh that's what you say to everything," Ruby huffed, "I mean, I wanna go do cool heroic things and help people, but isn't leaving Yang behind like messing up at the starting line?" This time no answer was forthcoming, instead Zwei just licked her cheeked and "arood" uncertainly, his brown ears drooping. "Huuh, OK, just go forward Ruby, meet new people, grab any opportunity you see and become a hero." She told herself, each word giving fuel to the fire that was her determination!

"Get back here!" A rough voice sounded from the distance.

Ruby's head shot up and Ruby ran after the yells, feet pounding against the road as she blurred down the street and between two red brick office buildings.

"Leave me alone!" A girl shouted. She wore a white and blue combat skirt and jacket combo that made Ruby think of ice, the girls hair was white as bone and she had a fencers blade at her side. Just behind her were two men in heavy plated chest and chest armour in a light shade of blue with dark bodysuits underneath. Both had Gun-Blades at their sides and were chasing the girl as she ran down a nearby alleyway.

Without thinking Ruby spun Crescent Rose out from its holster and pointed it towards and empty parking space. Grinning she flicked the trigger and with a deafening bang was launched forward into the air. Boots slapping against the alleyway's brick wall she rushed towards the feuding trio, Ruby launched herself towards the men in question and began to spin.

Weiss Schnee had been having the worst day of her... well the worst day she'd had in a long while at least. It had taken months of arguing and arduous tests in order to receive her cases of Dust, an airship and to arrange her participation in the Beacon exams. Yet for all her efforts, every argument and test, every battle and and protest, for all her grand ambitions Weiss had found her efforts unravelled in an instant with the same sort of effort one might apply to unravelling's a presents bow.

"All of that just to get turned down!" She raged internally. The white haired girl wanted to scream. 'He knew, he knew the entire time I just wanted to get away from him and just to drive the point home he let me think I'd gotten one over him!' Weiss seethed at the injustice of it all as her mind ran over the last few minutes, as if she couldn't quite comprehend just how quickly all her lofty efforts had been undone.

('Where did they go?!' Weiss asked herself as she walked around the Beacon Airship with a critical eyes. The gleaming steel observation deck already being flooded with Beacon hopefuls, her servants however were nowhere to be seen. The dark suited duo had claimed to be placing her Dust containers in a storage room but they should have been back after twenty minutes and they weren't...
even picking up their Scrolls!

Just as Weiss was about to march out and find the pair a finger tapped her on the shoulder. Spinning around with a well practised glower on her features Weiss froze as tall man in a pilots uniform with red hair and aged features gave her a salute. "Heiress Schnee?"

"Yes? Can I help you?" She asked somewhat slowly as she thought, 'I hope they didn't get in trouble.'

He gestured sharply towards an open door in the centre of the rectangular room and said, "There's a call for you ma'am."

"Oh, I see, please lead the way then," Weiss said and in moment she found herself in the pilots cabin staring down a projection of Headmaster Ozpin and Deputy Headmistress Goodwitch. The screen was easily large enough that the duo's projection was nearly equal to Weiss in size. The two pilots quietly worked the controls in the back seemingly deaf to the ensuing conversation.

The white haired Headmaster sat behind a large desk while Goodwitch stood at his side. The man clasped his hands and said, "Miss Schnee, I wish we could be meeting in person."

'Is he buttering me up for something?' Weiss wondered suspiciously, barely resisting the urge to arch a critical eyebrow at the man. Curtsying, Weiss nodded and said, "Its an honour to be speaking with you both, I hope to do so again after I arrive at Beacon."

The two teachers did not stiffen, their eyes did not widen nor did the gasp. There was no fundamental shift in them but years of living in the Schnee family had trained Weiss to detect even the most minute shift in body language or tone even if it couldn't easily be put into words. Something was wrong.

Ozpin unclasped his hands and rested his arms on his desk as he said, "I am saddened to say that will no longer be possible."

"What?" Weiss gasped. Her eyes twitched faintly and her nails dug into her hands. "Sir, everything should be taken care of, the paperwork, my credentials, I have the support of-"

"I am aware of all this, Miss Schnee," Ozpin sighed, slowly shaking his hands as if to dismiss her Weiss couldn't say. "However, due to a change in circumstances and at the request of-"

"My father!" Weiss roared, slamming her hand down next to the projector, rattling the metal.

"I cannot say. But I am sorry Miss Schnee I can speak with-"

Weiss didn't wait, she spun on around and shot out the door, her pointed heels click clacking on the metal as she rushed through the airship. Weiss pushed past some blonde kid and knocked him into a passing redhead as she shot down the ships steps and onto the landing platform. Her eyes widened as she hit the tarmac and saw her suited servants speaking to a man in SDC body armour as they stood next to the trolleys of white Dust crates chatting. 'The Dust, he's taken my Dust!'

A firm armoured hand came down on her shoulder and Weiss gasped, spinning and tossing off the man's hold as she turned and barely restraining a growl at the sight of him. She could barely make out his lips from between the helmets metal sides and dark visor, the surprisingly short man said, "Miss Schnee, we've been sent to escort you- Hey!" Weiss ignored him, a Black Glyph flashed to life beneath his feet and Weiss ran out of his reach and towards her Dust.
Her fathers suited guards both threw their arms wide to act as shields while the other armoured man ran forward to meet her. The high pitched cry of her Semblance rang out as Weiss spun like a dancer around the solider and in-between the two suited guard whom she cast aside with just a little too much mirth.

"Get back here!" roared the first guard, hurling towards her like a bullet with his hands outstretched. Weiss grasped the closest Dust container as fast as she could, free hand falling to her blade she sent her Aura running through the blade like blood through veins and unleashed a burst of mist into the air before running down an alleyway, intent to get as far as she could get from her fathers thugs.)

Weiss glanced behind her and sighed in relief at the empty alleyway, 'I got away!' She cheered internally, only for her jubilation to crumble and shatter as the last five minutes replayed themselves through her minds and she truly grasped what she’d lost out on. 'Beacon, Vale, a chance to get out of his presence and the shadow cast by the SDC, all of it gone!'  

'Professor Ozpin seemed apologetic as well,' She thought. On some level she couldn't even fault him, the SDC was practically a power unto itself. No matter what Ozpin could offer in age, wisdom or power he couldn't manufacture Dust out of thin air and so the SDC, her father, would always have the greater bargaining power.

'Now he'll have taken the hotel, I've lost nearly all of my Dust, my chance at Beacon and, and, aah!' There were no words to accurately convey the sheer anger Weiss felt, her entire body shook with unspent rage but Weiss knew if she let herself stop being angry she might just cry. Her fathers message had been clear, 'No where is out of my reach. You don't make choices I only let you think you do. I am the one with all the power so obey!'

Weiss didn't want that to be the truth, she emphatically refused it and now she'd escaped from the SDC guards sent to retrieve her, the soldiers likely likely having expected a miserable little girl sobbing on the side walk. They had adapted quickly though and if they found her the two men would present a real problem for Weiss's temporary freedom, she recognised their uniforms, the bulky chest and shoulder plates, the helmets and visors, their weapons, all of it resembled the uniform of the Atlesian military and these two had some degree of Aura training. Not enough to make them a threat but enough that she couldn't just brush them aside if they caught up and what was worse she wasn't even willing to try hurting them, not seriously anyway.

'They're just doing their job,' she reminded herself. That fact didn't make her resent them or her own escorts any less for clearing out her hotel, the Dust and trying to drag her back to Atlas though.

"Miss Schnee where are you even going to go!?" One of them yelled from behind. A chill ran through Weiss's frame as her Aura flowed through her with a tingle and she ducked into another filthy alleyway before shooting out the other side.

'Where indeed?' She wondered. One case of Dust, her beloved Myrtenaster and only the money she had in her pockets, Weiss had no illusions her account hadn't already been cut. Now likely banned from every hotel and pursued the heiress had few choices. But if she couldn't be a Huntress, if he intended to take even that from her, Weiss fully intended to accomplish a different goal in Vale.

'Blake Belladonna, last sighted fleeing a Schnee freighter and into the Vale city area, evading police,' she repeated to herself. Weiss spun her way around a tall man carrying a pile of books, using a small glyph to leap into the air and over the street she put some distance between herself and her pursuers. There were many things and people Weiss took issue with in her life but ever since the White Fang members identity had been revealed a grudge Weiss had been nurturing for years had flared to life. The heiress knew her father had done terrible things, she knew he used his
authority to hold sway over thousands of lives as easily as he did her own and that he abused that privilege to line his pockets.

But Blake Belladonna, the White Fang, all of them were no different, using the suffering of the poor and the disenfranchised to justify a genocidal campaign of thefts and massacres. 'If nothing else I'm not leaving this city without finding you, murderer!' Her father could be argued with and fought at home, but right here, right now, might be her one chance to bring the gir- monster to justice and Weiss refused to give up and let her slip away!

"Get back here!" The faster and shorter of the two soldiers shouted. His voice was much too close Weiss realized but by then he already had her arm!

"Leave me alone!" She snapped without thinking, wrenching her arm away from his grip. The other soldiers trundled up behind his fellow and both advanced on her, somewhat unsure of themselves as she reached for Myrtenaster.

Then, a powerful ringing gun shot exploded from behind the soldiers causing Weiss to jump. She saw a swirling mass of red rose petals blur into existence on the wall behind them that shot off it in a blurred spiral, the red tornado collided with the SDC backs chests, launching them into the air. The two soldiers crashed into one another in the air but managed to fall into rolls and steady themselves as they burst onto the street, rising back up on shaky feet.

The red whirlwind revealed itself to be a young wide eyed girl who grabbed Weiss's hand and cried, "Come on!" and pulled. Weiss was lost in a sea of rose petals as the girl dragged her down the street, pulling her into a pseudo-hug in order to speed them up as the world shot by in a blur.

'What just happened!?' She wondered.

Back on one of Vale's main roads two soldiers glanced at each other, confusion clear even through their helmets. They ignored the wary looks of the locals and shook off the last of the shock, the taller of the two rubbed his head and asked. "So did we just get kicked around by a flying red blur made of rose petals?"

"That sounds about right, come on!" The smaller of the two ordered.

They made it two steps before a high pitched growl hit their ears and the two SDC troopers looked down to see a Corgi glaring up at them.

"He's so small, hi doggy!" The taller one cooed.

"Move!" The shorter one said, shoving the canine aside with his foot, or that's what he tried to at least. But instead he found the dog completely unwilling to budge despite his efforts and its dark eyes were now focussed squarely on him.

"Um, nice doggy?"

"Stop! Stop, we got away!" Weiss shouted over the rushing wind, her hair was likely a mess now as well.

Thankfully the girl heeded her and they skidded to a halt on the side-walk, Weiss stumbled out of her grasp and searched for her balance with shaky legs and wobbly arms. Evidentially it was lost
never to return because Weiss dropped down like a sack of bricks onto some nearby steps.

"Sorry, I forget most people aren't used to moving as fast as I do," the girl said.

Looking up Weiss saw the doubles of the girl fade back into one as she rubbed her eyes and blinked rapidly, "Yes, well, thank you for intervening, I could have handled it though," She said uncertainly.

"No problem!" the stranger answered, giving Weiss a thumbs up, "Helping people out is a heroes duty," she finished with a cheesy grin.

"A hero?" Weiss wondered aloud.

"Oh sorry, just something I was talking about earlier, I mean you were in trouble right, and not for anything bad?" She asked. "I mean those guys did look kind of important but I didn't recognise the armour."

"I did nothing wrong, some people just can't take no for an answer," Weiss huffed, slapping her last case of Dust that sat at her side for emphasis.

"That's great! I'm Ruby and, oh here's Zwei!" She cried, the new name was punctuated by a bark and Weiss found herself thoroughly entranced as an adorable corgi leapt into the girls arms and licked her cheeks, yapping playfully.

'Cute!' Weiss thought. She looked around and saw they were relatively isolated under the small alcove of what appeared to be a bank. The people walking by paid the two girls and the dog no mind, no soldiers appeared in the distance and the corgi was so cute! Without thinking Weiss leaned forward and smiled at the happy canine and began scratching his head. "Oh aren't you a cutie? Yes you are," she cooed.

She squealed when, Zwei that was his name, licked her hand and barked.

"He likes you," Ruby said and Weiss found the corgi thrust into her arms, suddenly the day didn't seem, quite, so terrible. Silver lining and all that. She was however, distracted when her 'saviours' voice cut in from somewhere near her hip of all places.

"Oooooh!" She said loudly, the girl was kneeling down at her side, her eyes wide as she took in Myrtenaster. "Is that a Multi Action Dust Rapier?" She squealed, looking for all the world like she had stars in her eyes. "And look at all that Dust, a canister for nearly every type, that is so cool!"

"I, yes, thank you, its called Myrtenaster" Weiss said warily.

"It even has a cool name!" She squeaked before freezing up, hands over her mouth, "Oh sorry," Ruby said. Seemingly abashed she pulled up her red hood and said, "I just really like weapons but I don't get to see lots and hey do you want to see mine?" Without waiting for confirmation the red cloaked girl unfurled a hulking piece of red and black steel from her back which proceeded to unfold with a mighty crash of steel as a scythe easily twice Ruby's height slammed into the concrete.

Weiss's eyes widened as the girl proudly introduced 'Crescent Rose'. Weiss couldn't deny being impressed, if what little she'd heard of such weapons was true Ruby had to be extraordinary skilled to wield such an oversized thing.

Of course the weapons presence was also drawing more than a little attention, attention Weiss did not need.
"Yes, yes, its very impressive but..." she motioned to the crowd.

"Oh right, those guys, sorry," She said, and with a single flick of her wrist the weapon folded back in on itself within seconds. "So what were they after you for, maybe I can help?"

"Are you a Huntress? In training at least?" For all Weiss knew the girl was a Beacons student, or at least a soon to be student.

Ruby’s expression faltered a little before her grin returned full force and she answered, "Well sort of, I mean I was meant to be on the airship but..." She trailed off, eyes shifting from side ot side briefly before she quickly said, "Hey they weren't trying to steal your Dust were they?"

"No," Weiss said with clear confusion.

"OK they don't know that other guy then, 'From Dust Till Dawn' got attacked last night and I fought off some of the robbers but their boss got away even after Professor Goodwitch showed up and well..." She said, waving her hands from side to side. "You have Dust, they were attacking, I thought their might be a connection."

"So that's what happened to the store!" Weiss said. She'd been intent on running by their to fill up one some spare canisters when she passed by that morning, having needed to replenish a half empty case only to find it closed for the day and the windows broken.

"Yeah it was kind of crazy," Ruby said as she leaned down and rubbed Zwei's chin.

"I see, well that explains that then. Regardless I have to thank you, you helped me back there and I do appreciate it. If you need a favour just- I don't have any cards on me, so maybe we'll just have to meet again," Weiss finally said. The soldier might not have been fast but they would find them soon, people had an odd way of cooperating with those in uniform.

"You still worried about those guys- Ooh, If you need somewhere to go and regroup I know the perfect place! My sister told me about it and I bet she's there as well!" Ruby was looking at her with all the earnestness of a puppy and Weiss would admit, only to herself, she was running low on options.

'I don't even know Vale well enough to navigate my way around,' She thought. "What is it exactly?"

"Don't worry, it's really out of the way so I bet they'll never look there, it's run by a guy named-"

"Junior!" Yang called, flinging open the steel doors with a single push of her arm. The shout was much less playful than the night before and not just because she was kind of annoyed with him. Idly the blonde brawled noticed Juniors troopers were out in force, each of his dark suited minions was armed to the teeth, the door had been sealed, the twins were at their bosses side looking irate. Even the bear mask DJ guy had a machine gun resting at his side.

As for Junior the man dropped his red rocket launched at his side and went back to looking over his scroll. He dismissed The Malachites with a wave of his hand and the girls strode by her, not even stopping for pleasantry.

' Weird, but they're always kind of moody;' She thought. Strolling up to the Information Broker Yang guessed he hadn't slept well the night before and had no problem saying as such. "Wow Junior, I didn't know you'd feel so bad about trying to scam me you'd lose sleep over it."

"Did you kill my men!?" He snapped, slamming one hand on the bar and pointing an accusing
finger towards her face.

"No..." Yang said slowly, head swaying in confusion. "Is that what this is all about?"

"This doesn't concern a part timer like you Xiao-long, so if you aren't interested in running weapons or guard work I have no jobs for you," He said, waving his hands. "Come check back in a few weeks."

"What happened, did Torchwick roast your boys?" She asked, leaning on the bar.

"And then some," Junior muttered. He snorted and slammed his Scroll shut, Yang chose to ignore what she'd seen on there to instead focus on the man before her as he said, "Each one taken from their fucking cells and no one saw a god-damn thing!"

"You can't be gearing up to go to war?" Yang said, a genuine gasp escaping her lips at the thought. If that was the case she was grabbing Ruby and dragging them both to Vacuo rather than hanging around.

"Do I look like a stupid man to you? Wait, I don't want to hear your answer to that question. But no, we aren't going to war, there's no way I could increase my fire-power fast enough that some player, or worse Roman, wouldn't try to come down on me for breaking the neutrality bargain." He explained.

Suddenly Juniors interest in hiring her even before now made a lot more sense to Yang. Sure he could try to make the twins stronger or search for new muscle, but chances were he'd be caught out before he could get ready in time. But a Beacon level Huntress, if Yang said so herself, would give him all the space he needed so long as someone too big to stop didn't come down to end things personally and that was unlikely given fights like that tended to draw too much attention, Yang could attest to that personally.

Junior continued on, practically in lecture mode, "This is just a porcupine strategy; tool up and make ourselves to prickly to be worth fighting for anyone to try. Sure they can win, but not without cost or a lot of noise. I don't want Roman coming back to express his displeasure, personally, or that 'thing' of his," Junior said warily, as though the shadows themselves might reach out and snap his neck.

"OK I got that, so your stocking up on new wares and trying to hold the fort, good for you," Yang said blandly, eyes some of the new guns spread out amongst the minion patrol. 'He must have been planning on selling those, guess he can't now though,' Yang figured. "I am sorry to hear about your guys but I'll be out of your hair soon Junior," Yang said in a conciliatory voice as she could muster.

"And what do you need?" Junior said, almost seething at how she was taking him from his work.

"I need something big, something pricey, and preferably something to get me in good with the police. You got any leads?"

Junior almost chuckled as he leaned back and gestured around the bar said, "Tired of slumming it?"

"Just tell me if its possible and if so, who or what?" Yang barked.

Junior seemed to mull the question over for a moment before snapping up his Scroll and flashing through it with almost blinding speed. Unlike most Scrolls Junior had his custom made to be black with a red line to match his standard uniform. "Yeah I got something," he said roughly, passing her the little holographic projector, displayed on it was a young Faunus girl about Yang's age, golden cat eyes, a black bow on top of thick black locks and a grim set on her features. Yang's face
scrunched up a little as she looked over the girl, a buzzing pressure inside her head telling the blonde she should recognise the other girl.

"And this is?" She drew her words out hoping for elaboration.

"I should be charging for this," Junior mumbled and out of courtesy Yang slammed some of the money from last night back on the table. Perhaps wary she'd change her mind the former hustler slipped it into his pocket and was just a little more urbane when he spoke. "You're ignorant, that is Blake Belladonna, wanted across every kingdom for crimes against humanity." Junior didn't let Yang voice her surprise at that as he continued, "She was a member of the White Fang, and the leader in some of their worst and most savage displays. Evidence implicating her and confession from captured White Fang have turned up all over Atlas; personally, I found some of it a bit weak but the police and Schnees do love a good villain."

"So I catch her and I get in good with the police?" Yang mused.

"I think they'd have egg on their faces but chances are they, nor anyone else, would comment on it if whatever has gotten you so bothered, disappeared," Junior said, trying to affect an almost mysterious, perhaps even spooky voice. Yang wasn't impressed, but then she'd had the guy by the balls at least once, it hard to be scary after that she felt.

"This better not be a trick," Yang warned.

The barman waved his hands in a calming gesture, "No trick, she's deadly but everything you need is right there, I don't need you coming back on me for this, Belladonna's dangerous but chances are you could handle her."

Yang hummed, rubbing her chin as she said, "I see, got any news on where I might find her, the White Fang maybe?"

"You couldn't pay me enough to try spying on those bastards but I know some people who might. Give me a minute to write down the addresses then get out," He ordered.

"And you were being so polite Junior," Yang crooned.

Their little tit for tat was interrupted when a high pitched and terribly scandalised voice cut through the air like a knife, "Ruby this is a bar, we're too young to be in here and I highly doubt these people are savoury!"

"They do look kind of familiar, but hey there's my sister, Yang!" Ruby called. Yang spun around to see Ruby waving t her, a grouchy looking girl with a blue dress and white hair standing behind her with folder arms as Zwei ambled around sniffing everything and barking.

Yang just gaped, arms dropping to her side and she sputtered, "Ruby!? You- what!? Ship! I-Beacon! Why!?"

"Arf!"

"Dammit Xiao-Long this is not a fucking kindergarten or a zoo!" Junior yelled.

Eyes widening Yang noticed the angry looks her sister was being given and reoriented herself. The thugs were all glowering at Ruby who was fingerling Crescent Rose and glancing around the bar at every angle.

"Call your dogs off Junior," Yang ground out her eyes flaring red, "dealing with Roman was your
fault not hers," Yang bit out as marched over to Ruby and placed her hands on the smaller girls shoulders. She sent a glare towards the gathered crooks and was pleased to see them backing off even before Junior shouted, "Leave it, we have bigger fish to fry!"

Yang smirked as the bouncers turned away and spread back out towards the doors and windows. One crisis averted Yang looked down and met Ruby's silver eyes and with a tone that sat somewhere between a quiver of annoyance and an exasperated sigh said, "Can you just... tell me... why you're not on the way to Beacon!?" She hissed.

"Uh, well, I can explain see, there was this girl and these guys and they were being really, really mean!" Ruby rambled.

Looking towards her sister's new friend Yang guessed she was heading for Beacon, she looked familiar but the blonde couldn't say from where. She bit back a sigh, patting Rub on the shoulder and stepping around her, Yang reminded herself that this was Ruby and her sister wouldn't have done something so irresponsible and in defiance of her request without good reason. Throwing out a gloved hand to the new girl she said, "Yang Xiao-long, nice to meet you."

Taking her hand the girl answered, "Weiss Schnee, Ruby just insisted we meet."
Chapter 5 Claws of the White Fang

After Yang had scared off those suited goons Ruby had quickly found herself, Zwei and Weiss ushered to a curved, black leather and red lined booth with a matching semi-circle for a table. Ruby herself was situated in the middle, or that was to say, between Yang and Weiss who sat on opposite sides of the table, thus cutting off any escape routes, a fact that was not lost on her but one Zwei seemed cheerfully unconcerned by as he lay half on the seat and half on her lap panting and looking terribly relaxed compared to the rest of the bar. Their booth was well away from the cranky people though, and at least allowed for something resembling privacy which was... nice, she guessed.

Of course now that Ruby had connected these men to the one's she'd fought at the Dust Shop Ruby found herself casting uncertain glances at Yang who listened intently to Weiss's story. 'How come she hangs out with guys like this!? Does she now they're crooks? No, I mean come on, lots of criminals wear suits right? But then they were angry with me and kind of did what Yang told them and, no way, no way I am not accepting that my sisters some criminal!' Ruby denied internally, shaking her head and running her fingers over Zwei's dense coat.

Ruby felt a pressure running across her ribs and sucked in a deep breath, trying to order her thoughts. 'Come on, think about this rationally, this is Yang, the one who's always taken care of you!' She reminded herself and their talks over the previous night and morning bore that fact out, Yang hadn't suddenly changed for the worst, Ruby was sure. Focus regained Ruby reached her conclusion, 'Uncle Qrow even said lots of Hunters cultivate connections on the bad side of the street so this makes sense right? No matter what she's still Yang,' Ruby decided. Her chest and stomach unclenched at that thought as she sighed and leaned back in her chair, tuning back into Weiss's explanation.

"... and so thanks to that most of my Dust is gone and Beacon's doors are closed to me. Ruby said this would be a good place to avoid those low rent flunkies and that you might be willing to offer some assistance," Weiss said.

Ruby couldn't really read the other girls tone, it was curt, but it wasn't sad or even entirely angry either. Maybe it was a little annoyed or had some high class pomp to it but that only confused her more. 'She's talking like its a bit of lost luggage, even after her dad did something like that...'

Yang hummed in thought as she met Weiss's stare with her own before picking up her umbrella drink and taking a sip. Weiss and Ruby had only been given none alcoholic options which seemed to both please and offend Weiss at the time who just went with water that she was still refusing to touch, while Ruby had a half drunk glass of milk sitting before her. Yang returned the empty glass to the table with a clink and sighed. "Well, I can't exactly begin to list the ways in which your days been absolutely crap and I'm glad Ruby brought you here. If nothing else the goon patrol out there," Yang said gesturing to the guards scattered about, "will keep away anyone in uniform or give us plenty of warning."

Yang's fingers clinked on the metal table as she said, "I have to ask, you got any plans for what to do now? I mean, I can give you a place to stay, try to help you find work if you're interested, but beyond that..."

"But Yang we can't just let this slide, Weiss wants to go to Beacon just like me and you, its not fair that she wasn't even let in!" Ruby argued.
Weiss waved one delicate hand in a shushing motion and said, "It's fine Ruby you've already helped me enough for one day. Besides, I can always try calling my sister, Winter might be able to help."

"So what does she do?" Yang asked, leaning back into the cushioned seating.

Weiss perked up immediately and in a high tinkling voice the girl said, "She's an Atlas Specialist, Winter actually works right under General Ironwood himself!"

"Ooh, I've heard some big things about Atlas Specialists," Yang said. Though she almost seemed to falter on her words and Ruby could guess why, she and her sister had been present for more than a few of Uncle Qrow's diatribes against Atlas's military.

Weiss seemed to detect the awkward phrasing, folding her arms the girl arched one sharp eyebrow and asked, "And what exactly have you heard?"

"Oh uh just that their Hunters who work for the Atlas military and they have a lot of um... pull?" Ruby said, blushing a little at the awkwardness of her phrasing.

Both older girls glanced at her and seemed to repress a chuckle before Weiss nodded and said, "That's a very apt summary Ruby." Weiss's hand was outstretched and waving a little like she was some sort of spokespersons. Then she froze up, eyes widening as she gurgled, "Urk!" and clutched her head.

"You OK?" Yang asked slowly, leaning forward and pressing the back of her palm to Weiss's forehead.

Shooting back and looking at the blonde like it was the first time Weiss had seen her the girl finally said, "Yes... No..."

"Just realize your old man probably has enough pull with the military to make Winter's life hard as well huh?" Yang said sympathetically.

"Yes," Weiss groaned, as her head drooped and she stared into her water.

Ruby's eyes drifted from one girl to the other in the glum silence, quietly she said, "Yang, can't we help?"

Yang didn't answer right away, which was a bad enough sign, she didn't even look Ruby in the eyes so much as she just turned away and sighed. "Ruby," She said, "I'm not really sure there's much I can do."

"But if we-"

Yang's palm shot in front of her face as the older girl sat up straight her eyes closed and she said, "Look, I can give Weiss a place to stay and help her find work, but I can't fight the whole SDC... Well I could," She amended awkwardly, opening her eyes and glancing at the two girls, "but I wouldn't win... Probably."

"That's not fair," Ruby muttered.

Weiss threw back her drink gulped it down in one swig and slammed the glass on the table,
somehow still looking dignified while doing so, and said, "Life rarely is, but its fine, I appreciate your offers, I do, but losing the chance to go to Beacon isn't the end of everything for me." Weiss's blue eyes turned distant and glassy as she looked off into the distance. "I have some business to resolve in Vale and then I'll decide on whether I should go home or... Something else."

"Arf?" Zwei barked as silence descended over the table.

Ruby also noticed Yang's stare moving to her as the older girls lips formed into a hard line. 'She's going to drag me to Beacon isn't she?' Ruby thought, gently pawning Zwei off onto Weiss who accepted the canine's presence and actually started cooing a little.

However just as Yang's mouth opened her Scroll beeped and her sister quickly began scanning through whatever message had been sent. Junior yelled from his bar, "That's everything I have on where Belladonna might be hiding!"

"Belladona? As in Blake Belladona!?" Weiss asked, or maybe screeched was a better word as she clutched Zwei closer to her chest.

"Rooh?" Zwei rumbled, looking from side to side then up at Weiss.

Ruby's eyes widened as she recalled the girl from the Police Stations Wanted Poster. 'The White Fang girl, this was Yang's job?' Ruby felt a sudden mixture of vindication and excitement, surely if they caught this girl Ozpin would let Yang into Beacon and heck, maybe Weiss too!

Yang however barely reacted, muttering a simple, "Yeah," as she scanned her Scroll and chewed her lip, then she slammed her fist on the table.

"Arp!" Zwei yelped in shock.

"Dammit I had her, she was right under my freaking nose!" Lilac eyes flickered to shining red and Yang tore out of her seat and shot towards the doors.

"Wait!" Weiss screamed.

"Ruby, you and your friends stay here, Junior you better look out for them!" Yang shouted as she tore the doors open.

"Fine! But I expect a five percent finders fee!" He called back as Yang dashed out the door.

Weiss and Ruby glanced at one another and Ruby grinned and said, "Wanna catch a crook?"

Weiss's grin was... less than excited Ruby thought, it looked almost cruel in its sharpness as she whispered, "Something like that, lets go!"

Both would be Huntresses burst out the doors just in time to hear the fading sound of Bumblebees tire's screeching as it vanished down the street.

"No! Now we'll never catch her!" Weiss cried, stomping her foot into the ground and leaving an imprint as she pulled her heels away.

"Sure we will, we just need to ask the big guy why this Belladonna was under Yang's nose!" Ruby retorted as she motioned back inside the club with her thumb.

As it turned out Tukson's Book Trade was the man's best guess and luckily it wasn't very far for a girl with Ruby's speed and Weiss's ability to leap over buildings in a single Glyph enhanced
Tukson's Book Trade was closed for the day as its owner was otherwise occupied in the back room. Lines of book shelves and crates surrounded the two conspiring Faunus who stood just outside the aisles with one large brown travelling bags between them, while Blake's own sat on her back. Blake's wore her recently purchased black coat and and white scarf and was eyeing the rest of her disguise that sat on a crate to her side as Tukson methodically went through his bags again.

"You remember the plan?" He asked simply.

Rolling her eyes Blake drawled, "You smuggle me on-board a vessel either in disguise or in a crate and I keep you safe from any White Fang we might run across on our trip and once we arrive in Vacuo."

"Don't sound so enthusiastic," He quipped as he zipped up the last leather pack.

Blake simply stared at rows of books and said, "Should you be so excited? To be running away with a traitor I mean."

This caught the man's attention, he rose to his feet and said, "We're both traitors, that's why I feel I can trust you. Besides, heh," He chuckled, shoulders shaking a little, "No one with as good a taste in books as you could be unreliable."

"Well, I can't argue with that," Blake said, a small smile edging its way onto her lips. It faded quickly though as she wondered what was to come after Vacuo. 'Wanted in all Four Kingdoms, no one willing or able to help me in the long run and my formerly family going down a mad path I can't even guess at.'

"You aren't thinking of going back are you?" Tukson asked, his voice sounding rough.

"Please, even if I wanted to I couldn't... I just... I just wish I understood why this all happened," She seethed.

"That will be a question for historians to answer, the only-" Their only warning was the bell ringing as someone tore through the front door. Blake glanced through the tiny windows in the storage room doors and saw a flash of gold before the doors flew through the air with a bang.

Blake tossed Tukson aside and deflected the shining bullet with a clang resounding from Gambol Shroud. She slid back, leaving a charging after image in the girls wake that vanished the moment her attackers fist flew through it. Blake weaved around the blow and blurred passed the girl, driving the tipped blade of her Gambol Shroud across the girl's bare sides.

'Her Aura's blazing!' Blake thought as the heat of her attackers Aura rippled off Gambol Shrouds cool almost immaterial smokiness.

Another shot rang out from the blonde who used the force of the blast to send herself spiralling around, her backwards chop missing Blake by bare inches. The blonde's hand was mere centimetres from her face and Blake could smell the Burn Dust in the air, her eyes widened as the girls thumb smashed down on the trigger again. Blake flipped back and out of the bullets path, palms against the ground Blake threw herself up in time to dodge the blonde's floor destroying strike. She landed against a bookshelf and imminently kicked off from it, sending the shelf crashing to the ground as she soared over the blonde. It wasn't fast enough, Blake felt a hand curl around her ankle, her knees nearly exploding with tension as she was dragged towards the floor, limp arms trailing before her.
'Not yet!' She thought. As she was swung past her attackers face Blake used her free leg to strike the girl right in the eye. Blake threw up Gambol Shroud's gun and fire the lassoed end into the roof to slow her descent as she let her only free hand slap against the floor. Pulling the trigger again Blake felt a powerful tug on her arms as she was dragged forward. Pushing herself up Blake drove her foot deeper into the blistering girls eye, and twisted her captured leg even as her ankle screamed under the burning abuse.

Blake shot up and forward, her sheer momentum forcing the girl back, tugging on Gambol Shroud's black binding and with a stone shattering blast of Aura infused force bullets her weapon came rocketing back into the back of the blondes head. For just a second her attackers grip slackened and that was enough. Blake caught her gun and kicked the girls chest before slipping from her grasp and leaving another clone in her wake.

Flying back in between the shelves Blake unloaded a stream of machine gun bullets onto the girl's frame who shrugged them off as she had all Blake's previous attacks as she ran forward. 'I can't let her grab me again!' Another image left behind and Blake kicked off from the floor and over the remaining book cases. All of which immediate exploded under the girls fiery shotgun blasts scattering wood and burning pages through the air. 'I can't see properly!'

It was only instinct that saved Blake as her senses picked up the faint sense of heat and a brief flash of gold flying towards her from the chaos. Blake brought up the thick bladed sheath of Gambol Shroud to block another ear shattering explosive punch but still she found herself hurting towards the floor with a follow up attack incoming. Foot scraping against the floor Blake cast herself backwards as her opponent tore through another clone and sent a rippling shock-wave through the ground that sent Blake hurtling through the wreckage of wood, books and cement.

Blake's back collided with the wall with a violent crack that left the girl hissing as her feet hit the floor. She drew Gambol Shroud's cleaver-Sheath back and dropped to her knees as the blonde bared down on her. At the last moment Blake swung the blade down, unleashing a purple wave of raw soul energy, that tore through the ground and sent both girls flying away from one another. The blonde was hurled back into a wall with cratering force, and Blake was launched through the now ruined back-wall of the shop and sent sliding across the cement into the street.

A street filled with gawking people and in just a moment, a blonde, who was marching through the rubble as she slammed her fists together, growling as an aura of golden fire rippled around her frame. "So you can do something other than dodge," She said, her entire face consumed by a smirk of savagery and wide eyed excitement.

Blake sent a glance to Tukson who was staring at the duo from the hole in his home in open shock. She sent him a wink before looking back up at the approaching girl and saying, "You have no idea, but if you want to find out you'll have to catch me!" With a swing of her blade Blake unleashed another curved beam of energy which the girl met with another shock wave inducing punch accompanied by an ugly savage roar, that sent her attacked rippling into nothingness. But Blake was already on the nearest rooftop and running before she heard her pursuers shotgun assisted jump from behind. She almost wanted to smirk as she charged towards the Industrial District, lassoing her way across the city with a Huntress nipping at her heels.

"If I can't run then I might as well try and find out what's happening with the White Fang in this city, I just hope Tukson figured out what I meant and leaves!"

If Tukson had still believed in the gods of old he'd have sent up three prayers. The first, thanking Blake for acting as a distraction, the second for his own safety and the third cursing that girl for ruining their escape!
Throwing the travelling packs over his shoulders Tukson placed a wide brimmed hat on his head and ran out the door. He just barely missed two girls, one in a black dress the other in blue as he ran.

Tukson did not know how lucky he was.

Weiss and Ruby ran through the carnage that was formerly a storage room filled with books. Now reduced to a chaotic mess of burning papers, rubble and splintered wood.

Both girls squeezed through the hole in the war that led onto the street, bumping shoulders as they did so, and came to a sudden stop. Unlike the book shop the streets were largely peaceful, though the traffic had frozen and pedestrian were staring and whispering to one another, shouting into or recording the events with their Scrolls.

Weiss spun around, eyes straining in her skull as she sought out where the battle might have gone next, breath hitching as her sweaty hands chocked Myrtenaster.

"Where is she? Where did that monster of a girl run off too!?" She shouted.

The public seemed to stunned to react but Ruby cheered in the foreground, "Weiss I got it, look here!"

Weiss's head snapped to the side where she saw Ruby standing over two small craters in the street that were about two feet apart. "Ruby that's just-"

"Its Yang!" Ruby cut her off, waving her arms, "She does this to make herself faster! And judging by the trajectory and strength of her shots she went up there!" Ruby shouted, pointing towards the roof of a white bricked cafe across the street.

Weiss smirked as one of her less commonly used Glyphs sprung to life beneath her feet, ringing like silver bells and complemented by a dull hum. The silvery-blue Glyph spun and within seconds two smaller duplicates appeared floating in the air before he, a faint pulsing running through their outlines down towards the centre and Weiss blurred forward and launched herself through the Glyphs and exploded over the street and onto the roof.

At her side Ruby flew with a dose her her Semblance's speed and the shot of a gun. As the duo landed upon the roof Weiss cast her eyes wide and saw the faint outline of explosions in the air as two black dots exchanged blows in the distance. "There she is!" Weiss shouted, already charging forward with Ruby at her side.

'You won't get away from me Blake Belladonna!'

Blake's chest stung as she darted across the flat apartment roof's; even on her best days she'd never had the most stamina and holding a running battle with someone who seemed to be all about strength and endurance was exhausting. Especially when also trying to keep ahead and cut a confounding path across the city towards a specific point to avoid any new trackers.

Thankfully Blake had managed to lose the girl, only for a moment, but that was all it would take. Jumping onto a fire escape Blake sucked in a breath and called on her Semblance once again. Up above her boots scraped gravel as her pursuer approached and Blake blurred beneath the fire escape, spreading her arms and legs wide across the bottom to hold herself up.

Another shotgun blast rang out as the girl came crashing down on the fire escape. Its entire frame
shook, metals bending and screeching as Blake's world became a vibrating blur of confusion as the girl's feet left a painful dent in the steel that drove into her back. There was a moment of near silence as the girl seethed, the temperature around Blake rising as the metal jamming in her back began to sting before the blonde catapulted herself down into the alleyway and out of sight.

"Ahh," Blake sighed, releasing her feet she wrapped her fingers around the base of the fire escape, flung her legs forward and executed a perfect somersault, landing silently on the alleyway's grey path. 'She'll have no idea where I'm going now and we're barely a block away from the industrial district, even if she does find me it will be too late for a fight without challenging the entire White Fang and no one's that crazy,' Blake assured herself.

Walking down the alleyway Blake flipped up a torn and worn out poster for some band on the orange brick wall and grimaced at the White Fang insignia, three claw marks in the cement, appeared before her. 'Closer than I thought if those are showing up,' She mused, turning her golden eyes towards the smattering of sharp angled metal roof's and cement block buildings ahead of her. 'The answers in there somewhere and I'm going to find it.'

Keeping low and quiet Blake sprinted across the litter filled street and into the district proper too fast for the few workers and pedestrians to notice any real retails. Her sensitive ears helped her again as the sound of a painfully strong gun shot, probably a sniper round, struck her ears from up above. 'She called backup?' Blake thought, darting behind a small storage house and crawling in through a broken window and landing on a small brown crate in a half empty and nearly totally unlit store room filled with thick cloths and crates. Pressing herself up against the wall she heard two sets of foot falls land somewhere down the street as two high pitched voices spoke.

"Dammit, did we lose her again!?!" Snapped a shrill girl who spoke with a faint Atlesian accent. 'A wealthy, Atlesian accent,' Blake corrected herself. The girls tone reeked with anger and frustration at her expectations failing to be met.

"No way!" Answered a similarly high pitched but much softer and more cheerful girl. "That damaged fire escape was all Yang, oh I already called the Fire brigade and they said she called already," The girl added as if embarrassed. 'No surprises there,' Blake mused, almost chuckling. "That still leaves us here, with no idea where your sister or that degenerate Faunus is!" The other girl snapped. Blake felt her ears pressed down against her skull as if to hide but her teeth ground as she fingered Gambol Shroud's gun expectantly, almost hoping they found her.

"Well... I'm sure she's around here somewhere, there's lots of places to hide but with three of us around its only a matter of time," The other, lighter girl answered. "Hey Weiss, let me get some height and I'll scan around OK?" The light girl asked.

"Fine Ruby, but make it quick we can't let her get away," 'Weiss' apparently answered. Then Blake heard a rush of air and the faint sound of boots crunching gravel on the roof. Silence lingered on for an impossibly, agonisingly long time before 'Weiss' spoke up again. "Have you seen anything yet!?!"

"No, just a Bullhead coming down West of here, one click, hehe I always wanted to say that! Besides that though I can't see a thing, they must be sneaking around and staying low I guess," Ruby ventured.

"Hmph! With that Belladonna woman around industrial equipment and Dust I don't expect things will be quiet for long! Did you see what she did to that poor man's bookshops, and that was before your sister chased her off! The longer that psychotic is on the loose the more danger we're in," Weiss ranted, every words growing higher pitched and more garbled as she seemingly marched
back and forth outside Blake's hiding spot.

Blake had never wanted to hit someone over the head while laughing quite so much as she did right now, she tucked her chin down against her chest and almost grinned even as her body flexed in agitation, straining against her to go out and fight. The fact this Weiss girl, somehow Blake thought she should remember the name, didn't realize she was defending another White Fang member was amusing even if every other word out of Weiss's mouth repelled Blake. 'At least this means he got away,' Blake thought in relief with that weight off her conscience.

"Hey uh Weiss?" Ruby asked uncertainly, and Blake could make out the light sounds of the girls gun rocking and shaking as if she was toying with it our of nervousness.

"What?" Weiss snapped.

"Did this girl do anything to you, uh specifically I mean?" Ruby said, so quietly that Blake could practically picture a girl twiddling her fingers as she asked.

"What does it matter? She's a criminal!" Weiss screamed, the faint sound of a sword slashing through the air with a 'swoosh!' accompanying her cry.

"Sorry! Its just you seem way less "Yay lets go stop a terrorists!" and a lot more "Rar I want to hurt this girl!" if that makes sense, it was stupid, sorry," Ruby mumbled, the faint sound of tarmac grinding against leather as she presumably ground her foot into the ground in nervousness.

Weiss apparently didn't deem her companions words worth responding too and eventually Ruby, a girl in a red cloak Blake saw, dropped down from the roof with a swish, her feet striking the pavement as she landed next to where Blake knew Weiss resided and Blake's ears twitched as she heard them begin slowly walking away. Only for one of them, Weiss, Blake guessed, scraped her heels to a halt and spoke, "That's because I do want to hurt, no I want to kill that girl!" Weiss growled, any sense of cultured civility or whiny frustration lost to a savage abyss of rage so thick it sounded as if it made her sick.

Blake actually heard Ruby back up a little as if in shock only for Weiss to, perhaps realizing her error step after the girl and speak, this time in a tone near tears, almost pleading. "Do you know the White Fang have been at war with my family for years? Warfare as in actual bloodshed!" She cried. "They bomb our shops, they attacks trains and boats and even airships, blasting them out of the sky not caring about who they hurt even if they're just regular employees!" Her voice fell to a whisper, "They don't care who they hurt, friends, family, so long as it damages my father any price will be paid and everyday he came home furious!"

"Weiss?" Ruby said softly.

"That girl, no, that monster Belladonna is one of the worst, the things she's done, the people she's killed! I want, I just wan-"

There was a rush of air as Ruby moved and Blake assumed, embraced the other girl, shushing her before finally saying, "Come on, lets go find Yang OK?"

"Yes that... Sounds like a good plan," Weiss said tiredly, almost drowsily.

As they wandered off Blake slid down the wall and collapsed to the floor, a sickened gasp escaping her lips as Blake tried to pull her legs up to her chest but found herself half frozen in place and stuck staring up at the ceiling as her body tensed and quivered. Her head pounded, her chest felt so tight and her stomach felt ready to rebel, Blake shuddered as a wave of emotions washed over her
mind and her fists clenched as a desperate sort of anger told her to go and show that girl she knew nothing of fury and suffering. But her eyes swelled with something like tears as she remembered the losses she had seen and a part of her succumbed to guilt that left her wanting to roll up into a ball and never leave the dark confines of the safe house.

'How... When did the White Fang that argued for liberty and equality... become the destroyer of innocents and childhoods?'

Slowly, Blake staggered to her feet and clasped Gambol Shroud more tightly. She looked out the window, to the West where she suspected the White Fang to be, with a grim set to her features.

"I guess there's only one way I can find out," She decided, leaping through the broken window and across the rooftops as a blur. Slinking through the district Blake soon found herself above what, appeared, to be a run down warehouse made up of dull blue metal sheets with an orange angled roof.

However, Blake's well trained eyes easily picked up on the minor modifications that had been done. Not only had she passed Faunus wandering the paths surrounding the warehouse, though she knew some could pass for human "workers" in the area but there was at least two on every corner of the warehouse. If Blake's personal experience and history said anything these patrolling and disguised groups would swap out sporadically on an ever shifting time table, always looking for those that didn't belong and ready to send a warning ahead.

The warehouse itself was another hint. The thin windows that ran across the top had all been smudged with well placed filth from which no one could see in but look outs could see out from. Look outs, Blake had a relatively easy time avoiding. Beyond that the twin double doors on the front, despite appearing old, were heavy and Blake knew, reinforced on the inside. Small hatches ran across the wall at the street levels and along the roof for escapes or to act as vantages for surprise suppressing fire in case of a raid. All in all it was a a well made, high level White Fang base, the sort only a few of their chapters had, with the rest needing to make do in houses, temporary storage units or mobile camps in the woods.

'Of course given more than half the war takes place outside the cities it makes sense we need more soldiers out there. But these places are good for laying low and restocking,' Blake recalled, easily falling back into a familiar mindset. Shaking her head Blake brought herself back to the current moment, the four rectangular squares evenly spaced along the roof hinted at this particular base holding some Bullhead's. 'If its this big I can expect a well armed chapter, probably a hundred soldiers if they're on high alert. Most won't be a concern but if they have squad leaders or their commander present I'll be in for some trouble. At least,' She thought, smirking, 'If it becomes a direct fight.'

Silent as her ear-sake Blake jumped and ran around the massive warehouse and shimmied her way up a pipe and onto the roof. Even with her sensitive hearing Blake could only just barely make out the presence of people beneath her. She crawled across the roof, careful and delicate in her motions so as not to apply too much weight, towards the near centre of the steel roof where she peeled back one of the 'pop-holes' just a crack. She sniffed the air quickly picking up on Burn Dust, metal and sweat, her ears twitched as the sounds of a hundred voices chattering struck her senses. 'No one is directly below me, good,' Blake decided as she scanned the room.

It was a wide and dark room, much as Blake expected, plenty of Faunus had night-vision and those that didn't would adjust eventually. The warehouse floor was filled with Faunus all wearing matching white and black hooded uniforms and grey masks they hid all but their mouths. Many were holding blades or guns or had similar such weapons in holsters and sheaths. Off to one side of
the room were no less than six Bullhead's that a small number of Faunus were loading with small crates of what Blake guessed was Dust, food and other supplies. *They really are planning to clear out,* Blake mused as looked over the stolen shipping crates of Dust lining the walls. There were three shipping crates of Schnee Dust, now painted with the White Fang logo over the Schnee's of course.

The second level was a collection of original and White Fang added runways with only thin safety railing fr extra support, however Blake saw four reinforced 'trenches' jutting out from the load bearing support beams, the safety rails replaced by metal all the way around a circular segment of runway hanging down from the ceiling. *I can sneak through this,* Blake thought, crawling into the room, silent as a mouse and dropping down to hide behind a browned support beam that let her survey the centre of the room while remaining relatively hidden. Her black cloak allowed for Blake to blend into the dark more easily than usual and so she watched with relative confidence as three ranking White Fang marched up to the central walkway.

The one on the right was a surprisingly well dressed silver haired gentlemen in a brown suit and goatee. However his mutilated ear, the faint wear and tear on his clothes and the rawness of his long face and drawn features spoke of a harder life than the one his outfit affected. The second wore the standard White Fang uniform however the man's mask had been altered to one of the small varieties that resembled a Boartusk matching well with his own pair of tusks. Blake shuddered at her people's willing defacement of themselves by inviting such horrendous comparison to the soulless Grim. *Of course who's fault is it we're like this?* A traitorous voice whispered.

More than either of her compatriots though the women in the middle cut the most distinctive figure; she was easily six foot tall with short cropped silver hair, broad shoulders and very clear muscles. While she wore the traditional black pants and under-shirt of the White Fang, the woman's vest was instead an open jacket with a hard risen collar and long enough that it reached down to her military style boots. Her mask was larger than Adam's and shaped like a King Taijitu capping off at the tip of her nose

*So that's Lieutenant Rex,* Blake mused as she eyed the woman who she guessed was bordering on middle aged at this point. An original member of the White Fang Rex had risen quickly in their ranks once they turned from peace group to revolutionaries, thanks to a mix between her skill in managing troop morale, commanding platoons in the field and her own impressive combat record. The woman had two particular stand out traits in this regard. The first was her camouflage Semblance, allowing her to manage infiltration missions better than on par with many stealth operatives despite having only nominal training in that regard. The second were the thick pale claws jutting out from the tips of her fingers, Rex was of a particularly rare type of lizard Faunus born with something other than better hearing, sight or tusks. Instead her claws possessed a debilitating toxin that could leave an opponent in agony and struggling to move if she struck a blow deep enough, this left her focusing on a clawing and knife-hand strikes style of martial style. *That still relies on getting past Aura but if she surprises someone or even gets a lucky hit she can end the fight right there,* Blake noted.

Atop her head sat a white and baby blue commissar's cap, a trophy she'd taken from a particularly sadistic SDC mine overseer, people that were generals and slave masters in all but name. The second point that stood out about her were her gloves. Two thick white metal gauntlets that showed off only the tips of her fingernails, they were white and stretched down her forearms only coming to a stop at her elbows. The top of the gloves were lines with thin sharply cut Dust crystals that looked like they'd been embedded by force rather than slotted in; Burn, Ice, Lightning and Air ran up her in and all of which she could use to create powerful elemental shock waves and strikes that left her a dangerous foe to engage in closed quarters. She also had a reputation for trash talking but
Blake had never listened to rumours much in that respect.

Rex cast her arms wide and called for silence as the growing din of the White Fang truly struck Blake. 'They don't seem too happy,' She noted.

It seemed Rex agreed with her sentiment as the woman shouted in a surprisingly smooth but authoritative voice, "Brothers and sisters, daughters and sons of the White Fang, hear me!" The crowd's din grew to a mumbled hush as the soldiers all regarded their superior through their masked faces. Rex's hands came to rest on the dark steel safety rail as she leaned forward and looked over the crowd.

Finally she shouted, "I know many of you, especially some of our newer recruits are frustrated by our latests orders!" A quick wave ran through the crowd as people seemed to mumble, mutter or simply grunt in discontent. "I just want you to know that I'm right there with you!" She yelled throwing her fists up in the air and causing her jacket to billow dramatically as a fresh wave of chatter spread throughout the crowd only to be ruthlessly silenced by a slash of the woman's hand.

"You ask, why should we who have campaigned so hard in Vale and beyond pick up and leave simply because of police pressure! Should we not stay and fight?! Are we not being asked to leave our homes, our loved and the place we have fought for, for so long!?!" The crowd bellowed their approval, fists and weapons raised high as deep throat shouts of approval echoed through the warehouse.

"All of that is true, but it is not the only truth we must know!" Rex continued, sending the crowd back into a quieter and more peaceful silence than before. "Remember it is the unity of the White Fang that gives us our strength!" The crowd roared again, several "Yeahs!" and senseless "Rah!" cheers rang out as Rex continued. "We are a force that holds power in every corners of the world! But like our fore-bearers, those who fought and died so to free us from our chains and certain death in Menagerie, we cannot be bound to a single place or title! We are the White Fang, we are Faunus, we are an army that will bring a new age to Remnant but to reach salvation we must fight!"

"Yeeeah!" The crowd cheered.

Rex threw a single arm out and clenched her fist, a massive grin that showed off her sharp teeth and thin lips. "Know that we do not leave our kind to the tender mercies of our oppressors. Many have already been to a new camp out in the wilds to prepare for coming events! Those that have not or cannot join us will find themselves guarded by our others soldiers. These brave souls have gone to ground throughout Vale itself and shall watch over your families and home while we move to the front!"

"Rah! Rah!"

Holding both fists up high like a champion fighter Rex prepared to reach the apex of her speech. "Know that when you board those ships we are leaving Vale in capable hands! They will come with new allies, Dust and weapons to prepare a grand spectacle for our return! While they do so you brave ones shall be joining me at the front! We march to Mistral where we shall tear the spoiled master of Dust from their ivory towers and lavish arenas and give their stolen knowledge and wealth back to the people! When we return to Vale each of you shall be smarter, faster, stronger and ready to make this city yours! Are you with me!?"

"Rah! Rah! RAH!" The White Fang chanted, fists and weapons raised high as they cheered for their leader, for themselves and for their future battles. Blake quivered at the sound, the confines of the warehouse leaving the war chant to echo and boom in her ears, drowning out all other sensation.
"Now then soldiers, back to work, we have to be out of here within the hour! Oh and if you need to go, use the bathroom before we leave because I am not turning the Bullhead around!" Rex called in a more jovial, almost cheerful tone. Her joke sent a ripple of laughter through the crowd who ran back to their work with renewed vigour and focus.

Blake pressed herself up against the steel beam and tried to shake the tingling sense of familiarity and energy that the chant brought out in her. So focussed was she that Blake almost missed Lieutenant Rex and her two aides coming to a stop near where she hid. Blake froze, not even a breath escaping her as she waited and listened, her back pressed up against the cold steel column.

"That speech certainly lit a fire under them ma'am," Said a sharp no nonsense young man, Blake assumed to be the boar tusked man on Rex's right.

Blake heard the commander snort and mutter, "I suppose, course the problem is I wasn't lying to them, I don't like this, any of it. Adam's been doing who knows what up in Mistral for the last who knows how long, his protégé goes rogue ruining my operation and now we're being ordered to that wretched place." Rex sagged and for a moment it was easy to see that it was a woman pushing on her fifties underneath the mask and that for all her strength and vigour she looked worn and drained of energy. Sighing she said, "Really not how I pictured spending my golden years you know? Hah, well I suppose that's rude, of me, I imagine its worse for you old friend," She said, clapping the brown suited Faunus on the shoulder and grinning.

The older man let out a dry laugh and said, "No its not what I imagined either. I thought I'd seen an end to the feuding and bloodshed in my younger years," He continued, voice wavering and straining like a fraying piece of string. "Its my hope that this generation sees the last of it, and that what little I do here helps ensure that."

"You're a good man," Rex said softly. She shuffled slightly as if turning away and said in a more authoritative and rough tone, "New orders from on high, you're to drum up recruitment. Apparently they don't just mean regular stuff, they said, and I quote, "By any and all means necessary, ch!" She spat. "Adam's getting out of control and no one's reigning him in."

"He always was an independent soul but this is odd," The man mused softly. "I'd be lying if I said this did not trouble me, but I will endeavour to follow my orders to the letter in service of the cause."

"Good," Rex said simply, "In the end that's our duty, now I need you two to handle things here while I make some calls in my office, get everyone ready." Clapping the two men on the shoulders Rex spun on her heel and marched down the metal walkway towards a small boxed office that sat high elevated on the walk ways.

As the two men marched down the steps Blake went over her options. 'I can't get the Rex's lieutenant or the old man as far away as they are now, but Rex is probably quite isolated given she has so many working. Evacuating a base this size takes speed and with so many on watch she won't feel the need for guards. Besides, of everyone here she's the one with information I need,' Or so Blake told herself. If nothing else a few more solid details on Adam's designs might give her... Blake wasn't even sure any more.

Whatever had the rest of the White Fang thrown off had clearly happened after she left which could mean it was an unpopular strategy or Adam gathering power unto himself. 'Were you hoping for someone to blame? Some magical outside force that turned him into a civilian killing mon-' Shut up!" Blake ordered, strangling Gambol shroud's handles as she eyed Rex's office. 'Rex has some
training in stealth and a Semblance to match but those who have an easy time sneaking aren't used to being snuck up on.'

With that in mind Blake leapt from her position and landed silently upon the tin metal roof of the woman. Moving quickly she scanned the sky-light and was pleased to see Rex standing at her desk and leaning over a Scroll. Flicking off the lid Blake threw herself down, katana and cleaver drawn and black ribbon ready to restrain and choke. Only for her blades to find thin air. The office was small, business like and well kept with a comical poster complaining about Mondays hanging from a filing cabinet. The desk was worn but functional, the cabinets and rugs obviously second-hand and the chair she'd landed on was soft but sturdy. And the office was silent as the grave, not even a single breath save Blake's own filled the tiny metal box where there should have been two.

Eyes shooting open Blake launched herself off the chair, just barely avoiding a speedy grab that tore through a few lose strands of hair; Blake hovered in null-space and desperately tried to force her stunned body to move. It took a moment longer than normal for her Aura to begin flowing out of her to form a clone and that moment was all her attacker needed. Blake had avoided the grab, she could not however avoid the shock wave of air released from Rex's gauntlets as her hand passed by that slapped against Blake's body with a crack and sent her spiralling through the air, tearing through the wall and bouncing along the floor. 'I couldn't even summon a clone?' Blake thought dizzily, shock at the confounding speed of her impromptu flight having rendered her means of escape useless.

The cocking of guns drew Blake's attention, ears perking up she feel into a defensive kneeling crouch and scanned the warehouse. All around her the White Fang soldiers were at the ready, they covered every exit, lined the walkways, stood upon the Dust crates and Bullheads. All of them stared on impassively as Blake followed the lines of their guns. 'They're prepared for me, those lines of sight are all to keep me pinned not kill me but that means she figured out I was-'

A round of applause struck Blake's ears and the clang of boots on metal rang out across the warehouse. Glancing around Blake saw Commander Rex, gloves still glowing and with a thin lipped smirk on her dark red lips matching her sharp features.

"Blake," she called, throwing her arms open wide as she strode down the metal steps, military boots clanging as she moved, "You've come back to us as last! I have so many questions, how's Adam doing, what's it been like fighting your own brothers and sisters from the White Fang, and why in the world were you foolhardy enough to think I couldn't spy you watching me?" She exclaimed with false jocularity.

Blake's eyes thinned as she stared down the taller warrior, the soldiers mere background noise as she looked for a weakness in Rex's guard, the woman's stance was wide but she was read to step back and absorb a blow if necessary, her arms were held up on front of her as if she was beckoning Blake to her but her glowing-red gauntlets and their position over her chest showed that a direct attack would be easily blocked as well. "Grr," Blake grit her teeth and taking a shot in the dark she spat," What are you and Adam up to?! Why have things changed so much, everything I've heard, everything I've seen its insanity, why are you all going along with it!?!"

Rather than being thrown the soldiers seemed to merely tense, the cocking of guns and click of half pressed triggers echoing while Rex merely tisked at Blake like she was a disobedient child. "If that's all you have to say Blake then I am disappointed, it seems you and I really have nothing to discuss," She said a deep steel like hiss edging its way into her voice. "I had no interest in hunting you Blake, it would have been better if you'd stayed gone or come back to us in repentance, I still might have been willing to welcome you, after a time... But I'm afraid I have no choice now but to discipline you!"
Blake was staring up at Rex's face, when she spoke so Blake didn't notice how the commanders gauntlets were glowing with Burn, Freeze and Lightning Dust, until the woman clapped her hands, the sudden assault of sound stinging her ears and shattering her focus for just a moment. 'Which way do I go!?' Blake screamed internally as Rex threw out a wide hooked punch in the air, the movement was followed by a sharp curved wave of fire careening straight at Blake.

Just as the fire licked at her limbs and crackled against Blake's hazy Aura she jumped into the air, throwing a clone to the left she kicked off its back as the fire roared beneath her and bullets shot all around her.

Blake cut through the wave of gun fire coming straight at her as she rose into the air, only for Rex to leap up in front of her, hands wreathed in flames and poisoned talons oust retched her jab so fast Blake barely managed to bring her sheath up in time to be sent hurtling back to the ground. Blake fell into a spin, ignoring and shattered the cement beneath her feet as she landed and tried to dive left only for Rex to propel herself down after Blake with twin gusts of air.

Blake barely rolled out of the way of Rex's strike leading it to tear tore the ground with an explosive force, casting searing hot stones and flames in every direction. A single clone thrown forward let Blake miss the follow up but Rex was on her and Blake couldn't hope to match the woman's gauntlets with Gambol Shroud alone.

Rex continued her wide claw swipes, each attack sending out a random elemental wave of Dust; none with enough power to take her out of the fight but even just passing by her Aura and forcing Blake to tolerate pot-shots of the soldiers was wearing her down and keeping her off balance. Another strike soared over Blake's head as she ducked down but before she could dive backwards the floor behind her was torn apart by the ratatat of concentrated machine gun fire and now another blow was coming straight down, 'She's driving me into the ground, if I can't break through her guard I'm dead!'

Throwing caution to the wind Blake threw herself flat onto the ground, drew her legs back and just as the knife strike got within inches of her flung herself up from the floor and just mere inches past the lightning enhanced strike. Blake's feet slammed into Rex's chest staggering her for just a moment, a moment long enough for Blake to land beck on her feet, Rex's leg shot out in a blur and swept Blake off her feet and spinning in the air hands still grasping her weapons as she reached for the cement floor and Rex pulled back her arm and readied for another strike. The blow wasn't fast enough though as Blake used the moment granted to her by Rex's strike and her own hands to spin herself on the ground a single foot slapping across the commanders face before Blake flipped over to land on the ground and sent a curved slash into Rex's chest.

"Rah!" The woman threw herself a step back and brought her arms up to guard her chest and face as a surging Dust aura of lightning dispersed the attack harmlessly.

'Not enough!' Blake thought, throwing Gambol Shrouds cleaver back behind her as she readied to charge and Rex's arms crackled with unspent Dust and power, only for their battle to come to a sudden silting halt as a boisterous feminine voice roared, "Knock knock!" and everyone seemed to freeze in place wide eyed or their mouths forming into small 'Os'.

All eyes dartoed to the front door just in time to see a hand wearing a golden bracelets shoot through it with a clang! Before anyone could react the attacker had already grabbed the nearest soldiers neck form behind and just as he started to register his situation and gag he was dragged back in a violent blur and sent tearing the metal doors as he screamed, gun flying from his hands as he flailed. Before Rex could bark out her next order Blake's ears twitched at the sound of Burn ammo igniting with a click, she may not have been alone there as the doors guards were already firing at the gaping hole in the wall.
Blake watched as the reinforced steel doors let out a might clang as the metal warped inwards as the soldier and a disguised guard impacted against the door making the metal screech as they exploded through it in a rain of shrapnel. The restraining bolts and hinges holding it the gates up wailed for just a moment before flying off under the pressure as the remains of the door toppled forward onto the fleeing soldiers to reveal a single glowing gold figure wreathed in an aura of flames.

Slamming her fists together and cracking her neck the Huntress spoke in a voice tinged with an almost satirical bent and rough fury, "Sorry, she's already spoken for."

'She actually followed me here!?' Blake's mind screeched in open rebellion as she gaped at the bounty hunter.

The blonde paid little heed to sudden the rain of gun-fire coming down on her, eyes locking on Blake's own she shot forward leaving a trail of flames in her wake as bullet bounced from her Aura or clinked off her bracelets; the Huntress barrelled through the few guards still foolhardy enough to try and hold her back with an explosion as the charged towards Blake.

Rex wasn't accepting interruptions however, the Faunus commander brought both her gauntlets across her chest and they began to shine for an instant before she flung them both out, unleashing a giant X-shaped wave of golden fire straight at the blonde that she sprinted after.

The blonde didn't even try to dodge, instead she slammed both her fists together and thrust them forward in a twin-strike and fired!

'This girl is insane!' Blake thought as Rex's attack exploded, sending a wave of elemental destruction in every direction as the blonde charged threw it making a beeline for Blake, Rex shot passed the Huntress and any hope Blake had of her pursuer being a distraction for her escape faded as the two only slowed for half a second to slam their metal wrapped wrists together in loud clank before passing one another by. The Huntress not slowing in her dash for Blake and Rex arriving at the fallen remains of the door and bellowing orders as she flung it off her downed soldiers, this all passed in an instant and in a moment Blake was under fire from the blonde brawler once again!

Yang charged towards her bounty, hands stinging and numb from the shots she's just blasted. 'I just have to grab her, I grab her and run, or I bring them all down with this stupid warehouse!' Keeping low Yang dashed towards the seemingly frozen Faunus, rounding on the girl just as she looked ready to jump spring up from her kneeling position and flee Yang unleashed a round at the top of her head forcing Blake to dodge down. She still managed to kick off and slide across the floor, avoiding Yang's left downward for her legs. Thankfully the angle of the shot let Yang fling herself back at the Faunus just as she rose to her feet and she managed to slam her elbow against the flat-side of the girls cleaver sending her grinding back across the ground.

Yang spun around, ready to strike at Blake as the girl slid back, Yang was going to see where she dodged before firing so the strike wouldn't be wasted either way- only for an arc of flames to kick up in-front of her. Yang stalled for a second and then found the silver haired White Fang's boot lodged in her side and launching her across the room.

'Not the time!' Yang cast her arms wide and squeezed the trigger of Ember Celica, unloading a round into the floor she was spinning over that cratered immediately and sent her spinning back to her feet. She saw Blake try to escape but apparently her superior, or former superior, wasn't having it. After a rapid fire exchange of swing and blocked blows the smaller Faunus was sent hurtling back after one of her purple beam strikes was blocked by an explosion of Air Dust.
She landed barely a few feet from Yang who turned to dive at her prey only for the ground between them to explode into shrapnel and lightning that sent stinging shocked along her skin. ‘Dammit!’ Yang cursed as the Faunus commanders voice struck her ears. "Girl you picked the wrong party to crash, now both of you get the belt," She spat. Yang glanced to her side and saw Blake was back on her feet and practically hissing mad as she looked between her two enemies as the commander shot around them from Blake's left, cutting off her attempts at running from Yang.

Seeing the commanders glowing presence bearing down on them Yang turned on the dark haired Faunus, squeezed her gauntlets tight and unleashed dual shots at Blake while shouting, "Mine!" Blake blocked one bullet and dodged another, using a free hand to flip herself back onto her feet. The commander appeared in a blur and took a might open armed swing at Blake who barely limboed under it in time while Yang leaned out of its ways and threw a kick at Blake while letting loose a bullet on the commander, "Mine!" Yang deflected a downward katana blade and made a shot for Blake's shoulder only for her attack to be intercepted with a crack by the taller Faunus who Blake took the chance to swing her cleaver blade at. The commander drew back her arm and swung down towards the two of them, Blake diverting the blow with the side of her cleaver to get in her opponents guard while delivering a kick to Yang's stomach. "Mine!" Yang seethed as she met the blow head on, fire and lightning, strength and power clashing and resounding with a violent crash that nearly blinded her. What followed was a brief and sudden exchange of blows from three opponents, all trying to destroy two others while also darting around one foe and attacking the other.

It was Blake who ended the stalemate, her dark ribbon shooting out the girl managed to shoot the gun out and wrap it around Yang's ankle, up-ending her with a thud and managing to brace for a powerful backhand from the commander that sent her skidding across the ground and freeing Yang's leg. Rolling back Yang slapped her hands against the ground and threw herself just out of reach of an air fist that left another crater in the floor. Rising to her feet Ember Celica hummed as the next round clicked and loaded and Yang brought her hands up to guard across her chest and face as she gave the White Fang commander a red eyed glare. 

The woman's arms were rippling with light and Dust as she geared up for an attack and Yang-'What's she looking at!' Yang barely had time to duck as another one of Blake's sword beams shot over her head and hurtled towards... A very brig crate of Schnee Dust, 'Oh shit.'

"Everyone scatter!" The commander roared, her troops already leaping off the crates and out of the way. Not all of them were fast enough though as the beam struck they were dragged into the ensuing explosion that tore the wall and blew half the roof apart.

Yang didn't waste her chance, she spun around only to find Blake swinging from the catwalk, something she'd have laughed at any other time, and towards the White Fang's Bullhead collection. "Oh no you don't!" Yang roared, Firing two powerful shots behind her Yang launched herself into the air just as Blake tore through the White Fang grunts in one of the many Bullhead's cabin. The soldiers were sent flying out and the machine powered up just as Yang landed next to it, only for the doors to slam down, sealing her out. Engine's hissing and roaring with blue Dust energy Yang saw the fins rise and knew Blake was going for a jump.

Another shot from Ember Celica and the blonde surged through the air just as the Bullhead began to roar out of the warehouse. Fingers straining Yang threw her entire body into the dive and cheered with triumph as the Bullhead's top fin screeched in her grasp. That didn't stop Blake thought, instead the ship exploded out of the warehouse dragging Yang along like a fish on a juicy lure. Yang found herself almost blinded by the wind as she dragged herself up, grunting and groaning in exertion.
'You aren't getting away- that easy!' Yang swore as she tore into the ships thick metal shell and dragged herself towards the roof.

Back at the White Fang's base Rex was bellowing orders to her troops, "Get those Bullhead's moving now soldiers!" The explosion hadn't been terrible in terms of damage but it would draw the police and Beacon to them like moths to a flame. "Change of plans, everybody Evac now! All warehouses and ships are go! Grab the wounded and get them in first! Those ordered to stay behind use the tunnels!"

Her troops dashed about, some carrying wounded others trying to get one last load of supplied onto the Bullheads that all began roaring to life. Casting her gaze around Rex saw no more wounded soldiers and that everyone was moving. 'We have ten minutes at least before any airships arrive, we'll get out in half that and be out of reach in the next five.'

"Squad leaders three and four you're with me!" She barked and was pleased to see the two sharp and agile men running at her side in moments as she dived into the only empty Bullhead. Sitting at the controls was a young girl, barely sixteen with tiny antlers, she seemed to shaking in her seat but her hands flew over the controls like it was second nature.

She half turned and cried, "Si-Sir!"

"Get us up and after Belladona's ship, I want her and that girl in my hands, can you do that?" Rex asked deeply, placing a single hand on the girls shoulder in the hopes of steadying her nerves.

Gulping the deer headed Faunus nodded and dragged back the control levers. Rex merely braced herself while her lieutenant grasped onto the walls as they shot out of the warehouse and into the sky.

'Belladonna you and that brat, you're going to pay for hurting my troops!'

Minutes before that Ruby and Weiss had found themselves charging off towards and explosion in the Industrial District. It had taken the two girl less than a minute to arrive and both would be Huntresses stared as a ship shot out a smoking warehouse with Yang clinging to the top.

"Is she insane!?" Weiss screamed.

"Nope, that's my sister!" Ruby said proudly, a massive grin on her face ash she watched the awesome sight unfold. 'Yeah sis, smash that Bullhead!'

Both girls heads turned as more and more ships began blasting out into the air but the rest were heading West towards the sea.

"They must be trying to escape! But why's Belladonna going that way then?" Ruby wondered aloud.

"Who cares, we need one of those ships-" Weiss was cut off as another Bullhead rose from the warehouse's shattered roof and very clearly oriented itself towards Yang's comparatively wobbly Bullhead.

"I have an idea," Ruby said, swinging back Crescent Rose Ruby smirked as her gun unfolded into its Scythe form and she stared up at the Bullhead. "Weiss, jump on Crescent Rose's blade and speed us up!"
Weiss simply gawked at her but as the ship began careening through the air and towards Yang's vessel she jumped onto the blade and Ruby saw a blue Glyph flash into existence before he. Barrelling through it Ruby's felt like a gale force wind was pushing her forward, she charged through more to more of the Glyphs and the world bled away into blurs with only her target standing out. She almost didn't hear Weiss as the girl screamed, "This is insane! It'll never work!"

"Nope, this is awesome and its going perfectly!" Ruby cheered as the last trajectory calculation ran through her head. She squeezed the trigger and in a rush of rose petals shot through the air faster than she ever had. Weiss waved her hands and sword as they reached their apex and the two girls slammed into the base of the ship. Ruby lashed out with Crescent Rose to grab on, only to find herself already held in place, looking down, or up as the case was Ruby saw that her knees were resting against a massive black Glyph.

Weiss sniffed and said, "Did you even have a plan to sticking to the ship or were you just going to wing it!?"

"Uh, wing it?" Ruby chuckled.

That was when the Bullhead's engine surged to their full strength and Weiss's retort was drowned out by a scream as they shot into the air. Ruby felt her backpack open up and she immediately grabbed Zwei and slapped him down next to Crescent Rose on Weiss's Glyph.

"You brought your dog!?"

"Of course I did, what was I meant to do!?" Ruby cried over the winds, "Leave him sat the bar!?"

"Yes! No! I mean! Lets just get inside!" Weiss screamed as she began pulling herself along the Glyph as slowly as could be.

"Right! Once we take the ship we go and find Yang!" Ruby cheered, missing Weiss's muttered "And Belladonna."
Chapter 6 Wrath & Justice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Yang didn't usually climb on top of Bullhead's with torn up tail fins flying at nearly max speed, but when she did Yang truly wished she had grip-spikes installed in her boots. 'If I could walk this would be so much easier but one misstep and I'm gone! Nooo Ruby, why would I ever need something like an Aura activated grip in my boots? Not like I'm going to be climbing on airships or anything!' Yang thought. Dragging herself across the roof, metal twisting and tearing with every pull Yang ground out, "Next time Ruby suggests an upgrade I'm just gonna do it."

The wind whipped her blonde hair out wildly through the air, beating against Yang's eyes and somehow she picked up the faint scent of... sap? From the corner of her eyes Yang spied the blistering red forest of Forever Fall coming up ahead and hummed in understandings. Thanks to Burn Dust and her Aura Yang barely noticed the cold winds batting against her but the sheer sense of weightlessness, of being blow and pulled away by the air itself was... disconcerting to say the least. It was like free-falling through the sky but in the wrong direction, the added shaking of the ship and Blake's rushed piloting only made Yang's blood pump faster!

Glancing from side to side Yang saw that the Bullhead's two jet-mounted wings were in perfect working order. 'I could fix that but...' One look over the top of the airship reminded her of the Grim infested Forever-Fall Forest below. 'Right into Grim territory, dammit dragging her back to Vale without a ship would be a freaking pain!'

Idly Yang considered just punching the wretched thing to the ground and exploding it anyway. 'If nothing else that'd probably throw her... Nah she'd she just jump,' Yang decided. As she began clambering her way towards the left side of the ship it occurred to the blonde that she was clinging to the top of a speeding Bullhead fighting a terrorist. 'If my chances of using this to get into Beacon with Ruby weren't relying on this I'd be having the time of my life!'

Just as Yang saw the faint outline of the Bullhead's door no more than a foot or so away she caught sight of another Bullhead trailing behind her. Whaaad?

From within the other ships cockpit Rex patted the young pilot's shoulder and said, "Keep it steady."

The girl nodded and refastened her grip on the ships controls, masked eyes trailing across the window and over the humming control panels. Off to the side Rex's first lieutenant gave an affirmative nod as he stared at the holographic screen before him.

"Shoot them down," Rex ordered roughly.

Yang had naught but the faint flash of light for warning before the pursuing ships mini gun sprung to life. The bullets, hundreds of bullets, cut through the air and sprayed across the ship's hull like a hurricane of hale. The high pitched whistles of bullets and the clanks of metal were almost deafening as Yang pressed herself down. It wasn't enough to save her entirely, bullets still smashed against her skin with blistering force causing her Aura to send off pulsating waves of heat.

"Grr!" Yang growled as she clenched the ship all the tighter, eyes flaring wide as the rattling ship
beneath her screamed and started to waver. 'Shit!' She thought as the Bullhead turned completely on its side to avoid the assault, sending Yang's legs out flailing. 'They'd better not be cops!' Yang thought. Despite Yang being dragged around like a rag doll she managed to unhook her right hand and began pumping shotgun punches at the offending ship. Each shot flew out like a whistling firework, "Suck! On! This!" She yelled, each shout followed by a blistering bullet round that shrieked through the skies.

"Dammit!" Yang roared as the offending Bullhead wavered in the skies leading her shots to just skimp by the edges of its frame with bright sparks. "Screw this!" Yang shouted, her voice dragged away by the wind the moment it left her hoarse throat. Crimson eyes spying the nearest grey wing Yang tightened her hold on the Bullhead's frame and with a mighty pull dragged herself towards it. Yang let her fingers slide limply from their confines and she was instantly caught up in the chaotic hurling winds. They dragged her through the air, spinning her like a candy wrapper caught in a tornado. But it only took an instant before the blonde's feet slammed into the airships wing, adding another wave of vibrations to the increasingly rickety vessel.

Slamming her left hand into the ships side Yang smirked as she flooded her next round with extra Aura and savagely drove her fists into the wings. The scent of burn Dust and smoke struck Yang's nostrils and she heard her strike tearing into the metal that buckled and exploded under her power. "Hahaha!" Yang's laughter cut through the skies like a knife as the wing flew from the Bullhead's frame and they immediately entered a dizzying spiral.

'And I'm on the inside the spiral, crawling in just got a lot easier;' Yang thought. Her confidence only swelled as she saw the bay doors fly up, followed by a stream of small crates and loose weapons being dragged into the air and bouncing off her Aura like raindrops from an umbrella. Yang frantically pulled herself towards the open side of the Bullhead, batting aside anything that got in her way. The dying machines screams and the roar of its engines lost some of their weight as Yang heaved herself into the Bullhead's deck. She was just in time to see Blake shoot out of the cockpit and towards the other open door of the vessel.

'No you don't!' Yang thought. She fired two rounds either side of an unseeing Blake who instinctively crouched out of the way. The world outside blurred into an endless stream of red and Yang knew she only had a few seconds. Blake threw herself back and just as she was about to make the backwards jump from the dying vessel Yang unleashed another shot at the girls belly. Blake summoned one of her clones to take the brunt, flinging herself into the air. Yang smirked, firing both gauntlets behind her back Yang rocketed herself straight into Blake, tackling the girl out of the smoking Bullhead and towards the blood red forest below.

"Just leave me alone!" Blake screamed as she tried to pry herself from Yang's grasp, sharp nails were drawn across her skin and swift knee strikes rolled off Yang's frame like water as the two girls hurtled towards a nearly empty patch of hills. 'Slam her into the ground and she'll be out!' That was when Yang felt something smooth and silky slip around her neck. There was a violent tug and Blake's head shot forward, she cracked her forehead against Yang's nose and the blonde found herself spinning backwards. One shot from Ember Celica was all it took to bring her forward again but it was too late to save her plan. Both warriors crashed into the mountain, feet first, and their combined speed and Aura sent a rippling wave of earth in every direction. The ground rumbled and and roared as rocks shattered while dirt and grass was torn asunder and sent hurtling into the sky.

Blake slipped from Yang's grasp and spun her way around her opponent, tightening the noose as she pressed against the Bounty Hunters back and kicked Yang's feet out from under her, and dragging her up. Yang found herself quickly acquainted with the ground as Blake sent her shouting head first towards it.
Yang's neck swelled under the pressure, her veins throbbing as she desperately tried to keep breathing through the ever painful constriction. 'Oh no, I'm not getting taken out like this!' She thought, the sheer humiliation of a literal face plant being too much to bare. Yang twisted her legs back, wrapping them around Blake's knees and she aimed both hands over her shoulders, who knew, if she was lucky she might hit the girl. Two gunshots echoed across the forest and the struggling duo were both flung into the air.

A rapid exchange of blows ensued as they tried to untangle themselves from one another and gain the upper hand. Blake released her silk-trap and thanks to another clone managed to kick herself away from the blonde just as they landed. Her reprieve was short lived as another hail of gunfire cut off her path to the nearby tree line. The blazing shots were quickly followed up by a golden blur as Yang pounced at the girl with a, 'Hyyaaa!'

Blake slid back across the red grass and Yang's next shot was deflected by the girls cleaver with a loud 'twang'. Rather than running though the Faunus stood her ground, black cloak thrown over her shoulders to reveal a white and black outfit that honestly made Yang think of a butler. Blake spread her legs out slightly, digging her feet into the ground as she brought her black cleaver and matching katana up, the former to guard her chest and the latter pointed right at Yang.

"Done running?" Yang asked, quirking an eyebrow and smirking a little as she brought her hands up into a boxers guard. Her heart raced, not just from exertion or relief but in genuine frustration and sheer excitement at the prospect of getting a real fight from the girl before her.

A faint breeze wafted over the two warriors as they stared each other down, ruffling their now tangled masses of hair.

Blake was glaring at her, evidently not excited at the prospect of a fight. Her lips were set in a thin downward frown, her sharp golden radiating anger and focus in equal measure, her face and frame pockmarked with the remnants of her days battles. Finally the dark haired Faunus spoke in a firm, rough tone, "From you at least."

With that said, the duelling combatants charged.

Ruby couldn't deny some part of her was enjoying her current predicament. Here she was, bound to an external manifestation of someone's Aura, an honest to goodness Semblance, while upside down, with said manifested Aura holding her, Zwei and Weiss to the base of a speeding Bullhead! Ruby could feel the faint hum of nearly immaterial Aura against her legs and finger tips. It was like electricity and flowing water, a captured vibration that sent a tingle through everything it touched. And of course the scenery didn't hurt either, Ruby had scarcely ever left Patch and then only to go to Vale, or a particular hill near it. But the red forest below that matched her wildly whipping cape so perfectly? That was new, that was exciting and it smelt a little like syrup, she thought.

"Pla!" Ruby spat as another bug slammed its way into her Aura one moment and was scattered to dust in the next. "How long do we wait!" She shouted over the howling winds, clinging to the base of a Bullhead in flight was like riding Bumblebee through a hurricane and it made talking similarly difficult.

"As long as we need!" Weiss cried back, her words barely drifting passed Ruby's ears before they were dragged away. "They take us to Belladonna and then when they get out we attack them from behind!"

"That doesn't sound very sporting!" Ruby shouted back. The sound of wind whistling past her ears was bad but somehow it was the thrashing and snapping of her cape that truly seemed to deafen
"This isn't some game Ruby, we need to stop them no matter what!" Weiss screamed in response.

Before Ruby could answer the melodic sound of gears shifting metal unfolding hit the girls ears. "What!?" Ruby asked the empty air.

Weiss cupped her hands around her moth and shouted, "I said-

Only to be interrupted as the faint sound of machinery in motions became that much louder. Both girls turned their heads to forward and saw a thick dual mini gun sliding out from a hatch in the base of the ship. Six shiny steel barrels between them that practically shone in the afternoon sunlight. The twelve barrels let out a low, almost silent hiss, steam rolling from the guns frame before they began to spin, an electronic keening whine running through the air. Then it began to fire, low deafening banging shots flashed out one after the others in an unending cavalcade.

Ruby could only stare in horror as the ship her sister clung to was assaulted by a stream of bullets sending the blonde ducking for cover. "Noooo!" Ruby screamed, missing the blistering firework shots that flew over head. "Not Yang, not her too!" She wailed, deaf to her sisters returning fire as it flew overhead.

Ruby's Aura flooded her beloved weapon, spreading through it like a breeze and cycling through Crescent Roses frame in an instant. Swinging the gun to her side Ruby clasped the red trigger mechanism on the top and yanked it back like she was starting a mower. The metals scraped against one another with a quiet hiss and a thunk that was followed by a mighty bang!

The bullet whistled through the air and smacked against the mini-guns side with an audible clang! The mini-guns side sparked as the force of the blast sent it careening to the side, a massive hole torn through the barrel. The shock of the attack and the combustion of the mini-guns bullet that were torn from inside the barrel by Ruby's attack left the gun shredded and hanging mournfully from the base of the ship by a thread.

Ruby's gaze shot back to Yang's Bullhead only for the trademark explosive flash of one of her sisters explosive rounds to tear through one of the ships wings, obliterating it at the base and sending both wing and engine hurtling from the Bullhead and the the ship to begin spiralling down. Ruby quickly lost sight of her sister as the blonde dived inside the crashing ship and Ruby felt her entire world beginning to numb. 'No please don't go, don't die, please Yang!-

"Ruby!" Weiss's scream drew Ruby from her state of morbid horror just in time for the brunette to see a massive wave of fire barrelling down at her. Ruby drew Crescent Rose back hoping to slash her way through the blast and weather the worst of it when a harmonic sound rushed by her ears. Weiss's Myrtenaster shot in front of Ruby, thread-like runic engravings upon its handle and blade shining a deep blue, and just as Weiss's blade-tip met the oncoming fire storm the snap of cracking ice struck Ruby's ears and a wave of ice rose into existence in an instant only to let out a deep hiss as it was burnt away into a wave of steam that was quickly dragged aside by the howling winds.

Propping up Crescent Rose, Rub aimed for where the last attack was mostly likely to have come from. Weiss's Myrtenaster almost crossing over with her own gun as they aimed at the white coated figured hanging by a cable from the side of the Bullhead. 'The cable!' Ruby thought, aiming Crescent Rose up she unleashed a shot towards the silver haired woman's tether. Her attack was predicted though as the White Fang tugged on the rope, propelling herself away an instant before Ruby's bullet tore through the cable.
The roar of the Bullhead's turbines hit Ruby's ears and before she knew which way was up the girl felt her stomach being re-ordered into her chest as the Bullhead started a speedy barrel roll. Ruby's trained eyes did not waver however and she saw the White Fang woman running across the Bullhead's body, her massive white armbands glowing white. Ruby yanked the trigger of Crescent Rose back with a heavy clank and besides her Weiss thrust her blade forward with a shriek letting loose a wave of fire upon the woman.

The White Fang's arms went flat against her belly before she flung them out, throwing a giant wave of concentrated Wind at them. It lashed against Ruby's frame with a violent crack causing her to cry, "Ah!" as her entire body was sent reeling back with a snap.

Weiss fared a little better thanks to her attack diffusing some of the air blast and the fencer thrust her blade forward again, propelling a fireball at the armoured woman. The White Fang dismissed the attack with a sharp cutting motion and just as the Bullhead swung back around Ruby heaved Crescent Rose back up and let loose another shot, this one clipping the woman's side, staggering her. It wasn't enough to send her plummeting though and the White Fang casually hopped into the air as the Bullhead lurched back into place allowing her practically fly back the Bullhead's deck.

"What now?" Ruby shouted. It was a question she immediately regretted as the ship's engines screamed and the Bullhead dived for the ground at a breakneck speed.

"Juuuuump!" Ruby shouted.

Rex's body hung in the vacuum, almost gliding before she was met with the open hatch of the Bullhead speeding towards her as it finished its spin. Lashing out with her left hand Rex grasped one of the handlebars and dragged herself in, the sudden loss of shrieking winds ripping by her ears barely even registering as she dashed into the cockpit and shouted, "Land this ship! We'll try and grind them into the ground but be ready for a sudden stop by hostiles, understand!?

"Yes ma'am!" The pilot cried, thrusting the controls forward.

Rex spun around, jacket billowing as she watched their ship drop like a stone from the corner of her eye. The wind outside whistled and shrieked by the open hatch. "Get starboard, brace for impact and keep your eyes out!" She shouted and her lieutenants rushed to acquiesce.

Rex slid her legs out, rearing one arm back channelling a burst of Aura into the Burn Dust while bringing the other up to guard over her chest and bringing forth a shield of Air Dust, she hadn't survived as long as she had by not being paranoid. Three blurs flashed out from beneath the ship, one brown, one red and trailing rose petals and the last of which was blue with a streak of white. Her mere presence sent Rex's entire being aflame, her frame shook with barely restrained energy while her lungs and eyes burnt. She could feel her teeth clenching, muscles and joints tense and popping, her veins throbbed like wires beneath her skin as her Aura surged around her.

'Schnee!'

When Weiss released Ruby and Zwei from her Glyph's hold the red cloaked girl grabbed her canine and exploded off from the base of the Bullhead with a concussive mix of gunfire and Semblance enhanced speed that sent her hurtling into the tree line. Weiss, on the other hand, concentrated her holding Glyph beneath her feet as she watched the approaching ground with wide eyes that felt like they were straining against her skull.

Myrtenaster 's tip rested on the ships base, its entire blade radiating energy as blue ice Dust writhed
as Weiss poured more of her Aura into Myrtenaster. 'five, four-' Weiss pressed herself low against the vibrating base of the Bullhead as the tree-line appeared ahead. 'three-two-' Her position near the back of the curved airship meant Weiss was shielded from being struck by the trees the ship was tearing through in its insane rush to crush her. 'One!' Weiss drove Myrtenaster sharply forward across the ships hull and screamed as she unleashed a giant burst of hissing ice upon the ships base as she flung herself back and off the vessel.

Weiss was just in time to see the Bullhead's entire bottom half and the ground get frozen together by one giant Aura infused ice pillar that clawed around the Bullhead like a giant hand waiting to crush the occupants. 'Wait where's the dama-' Weiss's eyes shot up and she saw the ships cylindrical turbines were facing forward rather than back.

A gasp escaped Weiss's mouth as she began to feel gravity exert its will upon her just in time to see the White Fang from earlier leap from the ship. Arms wreathed in flames and fists slammed together the Faunus discharged a gargantuan ball of fire that seemed to scream and roar as it raced to consume her. Weiss's hand shook as she tried to draw up her blade to defend herself. Her mind was silent as she stared upon the roaring death hurtling towards her, no Glyphs or defences coming to bare, as though her entire mind was simply frozen in shock.

Then something grabbed her. 'Ruby!' Weiss thought as she felt the girls arms slip around her chest as the brunette tackled her out of the sky and with a powerful 'bang!' shot them both out of the attacks path. Ruby skidded to a halt and Weiss blinked away her shock just in time to see the burning orb collide with the forests. What followed was an explosion of fire and force, like a meteor striking the earth Weiss heard the deafening explosions and felt the crash shake the earth. Burning fragments of dirt and stone were cast into the air and a spire of fire shot up into the sky staining the entirety of the already crimson forest in a new shade of red before finally dying down.

"Weiss can you stand?" Ruby asked, her voice a far cry from the fidgety, friendly but criminally unsure girl from earlier. Now she spoke with a voice thick with concern but heavy with something like authority. Her lips were set in an almost dour frown and her silver eyes were focussed squarely on the Faunus commander who watched the duo from behind her snake-like mask as two more Faunus jumped down behind her, silver rifle-swords drawn.

The faint scent of smoke touched Weiss's nose and the howls of Beowolves rang out from the forest. Weiss quickly pulled herself from Ruby's grasp and brought Myrtenaster up to guard as she took a side-long stance and stared down the Faunus and simply said, "I can fight." Behind her Weiss heard the tell-tale sound of Ruby's Crescent Rose unfolding and the girl coming up to her side. It was only now that she'd regained her senses that Weiss saw how close the White Fang were, barely five feet stood between the opposed factions.

All three Faunus glared at her, Weiss was the sole focus of their attention, she could feel it and the they almost seemed dumbfounded. After a moment the leader stepped forward, flicking up her mask, the Faunus woman's thin features and sharp cheeks truly reminded Weiss of a snake.

"A Schnee," One of the men behind her spat. Both of the men leaned forward as if ready to pounce, clutching their thick silver gun-blades close to their chests. They were forestalled however when the woman's left fist shot up, a classic military signal for 'stop'.

She took an almost leisurely step forward, not once taking her eyes of Weiss's own and finally she barked, "Find Belladona, capture her if you can, understand?"

The boar tusked White Fang balked and shouted, "But commander Rex-"

The White Fang commander, Rex, cut him off and in a deep, rough yet almost playful voice said,
"Follow your orders soldiers, don't worry I'll save you a memento." The soldiers grimaced but quickly turned and darted off into the forest towards where Belladona's ship had crashed.

"Yang!" Ruby cried, and with a rush of wind that sent Weiss's dress and hair awry. The brunette tried to dash around the commander only for the woman's arm to shoot out to her right unleashing a bolt of lighting in front of Ruby's path. Ruby skidded to a halt with a shriek, "Ah!"

"Ruby!" Weiss cried. Weiss dashed forward and with a flame blazing at the tip of her sword thrust it towards the woman's throat. Only for her Dust infused gauntlet to flash up between them, a surge of air snuffing Weiss'f flame out. Myrtenaster was flung aside with a single sharp swing of her arm and Weiss was forced to contort herself out of the way of the remaining air wave. Only to find the woman's clawed hands bearing down on her throat when a crack struck Weiss's ears and the Faunus's hand was blasted away by a bolt of Sniper fire. Using her precious second carefully Weiss threw herself back, sliding across her Glyphs and retaking her stance. 'Idiot, rushing in like that, what was I thinking?'

The commander still hadn't put her mask down and her eyes strayed from Ruby, to Weiss and then the ship. "You should leave girl," She said as her eyes momentarily fell on Ruby, "You're fast enough to find this 'Yang' and get back to Vale. I've no interest in killing you or her if I don't have to, so just leave," She said in a guttural voice.

"Hah!" Weiss's laughter was short, clipped and entirely devoid of life and humour. "You shouldn't trust one of these cowardly monsters Ruby," Weiss said, watching her opponent for any wave of anger or frustration. Weiss tightened her hold on Myrtenaster, to her left she saw Ruby hadn't taken her chance to run and was instead watching them with an unhappy frown.

Rather than roaring in anger the Faunus merely snorted and said, "Cowardly monster? You have the fucking gall to call me that."

"I have every right to call you out for exactly what you are, every last one of you White Fang killers want nothing more than to destroy people! Destroy humanity! To destroy my family!" Weiss screamed, foot scraping on the smouldering grass as she stamped.

The Faunus's entire body shook and her eyes looked almost sunken as she roared, "You and your family! All your wealth and power is built on the blood and bones of our children!" Gauntlets crackling with lightning the Faunus clenched her fists with an audible crack and with a flick of her head brought her mask slide back over her face. "But now I'll grant your father the same mercy he gave us and show him what its like to lose a child!" She raged, dragging her screeching, lightning enshrouded arms forward and unleashing streams of lighting at Weiss.

Weiss's Glyphs pulled her aside barely allowing Weiss to dodge the blinding attack that went to tear through the woods.

Bullets from Crescent Rose shot through the air and towards the Faunus again only to be wiped out by the raging shield of lightning around Rex's arms. Snarling the Faunus swung her right arm out, unleashing a curved beam of lighting.

Ruby pre-empted her by shooting at the ground and launching herself into the air. Knowing Ruby was exposed in the air Weiss thrust her blade forward and unleashed a howling torrent of rotating winds at the Faunus who met the miniature tornado with a wind enshrouded fist spinning counter clockwise that dispersed Weiss's attack. Above her, Weiss heard Ruby shoot in the air and come crashing down at her side, only to fire behind them and charge at the Faunus.

Ruby hurtled towards the Faunus with a cry, "Hiyaa!" Crescent Rose had extended into an even
longer blade and trailed behind Ruby as she vanished into a red blur.

Ruby swung Crescent Rose left to give herself maximum distance from this 'Rex' woman as she charged. The familiar cry of the wind rushing past her ears was less than white noise as her eyes focussed solely on her target. Rex was trying to dodge but was kept half pinned by Weiss's tornado. Ruby squeezed the trigger and lunged forward, Crescent Rose sailing behind her and as she passed her opponent the curved blade crashed against Rex's arm-plates with a crack not unlike gun fire.

Ruby felt it before anything else, the sudden explosive force of Dust infused with Aura and heat. Pulling Crescent Rose's trigger again Ruby jumped, the gravity round helping launch her into the air. She hit the trapped Bullhead's side and sprinted over the hull before swinging Crescent Rose around to her right. She saw Weiss launch herself at the White Fang Commander, shining blue Glyphs spinning into existence beneath her heels as she charged with her sword outstretched and glowing red. Rex wasn't looking too good, Ruby noticed, the woman's left arm-band was half shattered and her arm bleeding. 'Weiss is coming in from the left which means,' Ruby thought quickly, unleashing another shot Ruby launched at Rex's right with another battle cry.

Weiss thrust the super heated Myrtenaster right at the Faunus woman's chest. The Faunus threw herself back, her arm shooting up to knock her strike aside, Weiss sent another pulse of Aura into her blade and unleashed a concentrated beam of pure heat from Myrtenaster's tip. A deep red beam barely as wide as Myrtenaster surged forward cutting through the Faunus's arm guards and burning a scar over her shoulder.

"Hya!" Ruby's war cry hit Weiss's ears as the girl flashed into existence at the Faunus's side. Crescent Rose swung down around the Faunus's neck like an executioner's blade while Weiss pressed down on the woman's arm-guard. However a sudden burst of wind allowed the White Fang to spin below the decapitating strike and out of Weiss's attack.

"Weiss hold her!" Ruby shouted as she dashed at the Faunus and scoring a glancing blow across her chest only for a shot of Air Dust to send her careening into the trees. Before Weiss could consider what Ruby meant the Faunus swung at her. Weiss dived below a wave of lightning that sent her hair on end and with a roar thrust her blade up towards the woman's throat. "Gra!" The Faunus's armoured palm intercepted the blow just before Weiss struck. Casting her arm aside the Faunus redirect Weiss's strike into the empty air.

Weiss feigned being thrown off balance but internally smirked as she slammed her blade into the earth. Sucking in a deep breath Weiss waved her hands and sent a surge of Aura across the ground forming a massive black Glyph under the White Fang's feet, binding her to the ground. Weiss smirked as she spied the Woman trying to tear her feet from the Glyphs hold, only for her mirth to turn to misery as she tried to stand. 'I can barely hold her as it is, I spent so much Aura... I can't move!'

"Damn you!" The Faunus roared. Weiss looked up, eyes wide as saucers as a flaming fist descended upon her.

"Arf!" Zwei barked. The tiny Corgi burst onto the scene in a flash, rolling himself into a ball and hurtling through the air, he collided with the White Fang's fist, cracking her armour and sending her fire blast astray. Before Weiss could celebrate however the Faunus roared, dragging her arm back and hurling Zwei off her and into the air. Zwei yelped as he bounced off the ground and landed on unsteady paws as if dazed and then, ears twitching immediately ran off.

Before her attacker could continue her assault or Weiss could try to escape a shock wave exploded through the air. Weiss turned to the foliage where it came from and saw a gathering tempest of red and brown swirling behind a spiralling red spear.
There was no time, in one instant Weiss saw it and in the next she could feel the howling winds on her neck. The red spear crashed against the Faunus's chest and Weiss instinctively released her Semblance just as the woman lurched back with a scream. Ruby burst out off the spinning spear and clasped Weiss's hand with her own, Weiss threw out a single propulsion Glyph and the two girls just barely dragged each other out of the way of Ruby's attack.

The White Fang had no time to get her bearing and Weiss watched in fascinated horror from the grass as trees and stones torn from the ground gathered into a massive spiralling tornado that crashed against with all the force of an avalanche against the commander. The Faunus was sent screaming through the air, tearing through the ice pillar holding the Bullhead before crashing into a raised hill with an explosion of force that sent dust and dirt hurtling into the sky.

Weiss shuddered as the Bullhead slammed against the ground with a reverberating thud. Ruby sagged against her panting and gasping for breath while mumbling, "Zwei? Weiss? You OK? I'm O. We all OK?"

"Of course I'm fine you dolt," Weiss sighed. Sucking in a deep breath Weiss slipped her arm under Ruby's and slung the girls other arm over her shoulder and staggered to her feet as Ruby wobbled dizzily.

"Arf!" Zwei barked, running back up to his owners side and looking no worse for wear as he panted and nuzzled Ruby's leg.

"Oh hey Zwei... That was... lets not do that again for awhile OK? I don't feel so great," Ruby murmured. Despite her clear exhaustion Ruby still held Crescent Rose in a death grip even as she sagged against Weiss for support.

"Honestly," Weiss sighed shaking her head, "Just leave me at her mercy until the last moment why don't you?" Weiss reached out and grabbed her sword and began guiding a steadily more firm footed Ruby around the Bullhead.

Chuckling Ruby said, "Hehe, yeah, sorry but I kinda got thrown by that lightning thing she did and needed a huge run up for it to work."

Weiss let out a small dry chuckle before sobering as they passed the head of the ship. "Ruby," She said quietly, "Why did you stay? What about Yang?"

Ruby's entire frame stiffened and for a moment Weiss feared the girl would try to bolt. However she only ruffled her arms a little and then answered, "I couldn't leave you to fight alone, she was really strong and you seemed kind of angry. Besides Yang's strong I know she'll win... But if we could go after her in a minute that'd be great."

Weiss nodded and was about to answer when her eyebrows shot up her forehead at the carnage Ruby's attack had wreaked. Just on the other side of the Bullhead there's been a small hill, not barely as tall as the airship itself but it had still existed as a small almost islands on the otherwise flat locale. Now it was a mass of torn clothes, rubble, scattered dirt and what looked to be a thousand fragments of wood that had once been trees. All of it was coated in red rose petals and Forever Fall red leaves with the White Fang Commander laying face down on the wreckage and just barely peaking out of the crater Ruby's attack had left. Her arm-guards were cracked even further, her uniform and coat in tatters and marred with blood.

Ruby tilted her head and hummed before saying, "I don't see her getting up? Think we won?"

Weiss's eyes bore into the Faunus and after a moment she gulped and shook her head. "Not yet,
she's still alive," Weiss muttered as she saw the faint rise and fall of the terrorist lungs. Sensing that Ruby could stand on her own Weiss slipped out from under the other girls arm and marched towards the unconscious Faunus, blade in hand. As she stumbled over the debris Weiss felt her hands shaking, her insides knotting up on themselves. She ran through the list of wrongs the White Fang had committed against her, against anyone, and tried to overlay the woman's masked visage with each one.

'She said she was going to kill me, I'm going to be a Huntress, sometimes that means-' Weiss's hand froze and her body stilled before she had even reached the Faunus as Ruby clasped her wrist.

"Weiss," Ruby said plaintively as Zwei whined at her side, "I didn't just stay to help you fight, I stayed to make sure you wouldn't do something you might regret later."

Weiss shook, her eyes stung and she began rapidly blinking away the sensation of tears before shaking off the other girl, then Weiss said, "If you don't have the stomach for it I don't blame you, just turn around Ruby..."

"Weiss this is murder!" Ruby cried.

Weiss raised her sword, teeth grinding and eyes wide as she shouted, "This is justice!"

Before Weiss could continue the crack of a gunshot rang out and both girls dived apart as a hail of bullets whizzed between them. Weiss spun around, sword across her chest as she deflected one of the bullets with a 'tink!' and she got a look at her attacker. They were a Faunus, small, female, and in the standard White Fang uniform with horns jutting out between her grey mask and black hood. She held a red and black pistol in one hand and a dull broadsword in the other, her arms were crossed over one another and the girl let out a shriek as she dived at Weiss.

Weiss flung herself at the girl and their blades met with a muted clang as her strike sent the Faunus girl staggering back. Ruby was still dazed and lying on the floor but she wouldn't be needed for this battle, Weiss could feel it, her attacker was inexperienced at best. Rushing forward Weiss slashed, Myrtenaster a silver blur to her opponent as Weiss practically bludgeoned the girls blade and sent the Faunus rolling to the ground.

Before she even stopped rolling the Faunus slammed her hands into the ground and pushed herself back up on wobbly feet. "Aaaah!" She screamed, charging and swinging her sword out in several wild and confused slashes as she tried to fend of an attack. Weiss merely spun around the girl and made a quick swipe of her blade across the girls back, not deep enough to truly wound her even without Aura but enough to knock her off balance again.

"Just leave, I'm not interested in putting down their new recruits, just your monstrous ring leaders," Weiss bit out as she pointed Myrtenaster at the girl. She sent a pulse of Aura into her sword, white Sir Dust lighting up the Glyphs running along its frame and conjuring a light breeze around the blade.

The Faunus seethed, no it sounded more like she was heaving, deep harsh breath sucked in through her teeth, her entire frame shaking and quivering as she tried to stare Weiss down. Finally she spoke in a high pitched voice, "You've taken so much from us who had so little, I won't let you take my Commander from me, too!"

"Tch," Weiss hissed, unwilling to even gaze at the Faunus's mask. as she spat, "That's not your choice, run away, or fall here!" A blue Glyph sprung into existence beneath her feet and Weiss skated forward.
"Noooo!" Roared a voice, sounding almost like a blender screaming against Weiss's ears. Before Weiss could even blink two heavily cracked but glowing gauntlets appeared at her side. The Commanders first smashed Weiss's strike aside, launching Myrtenaster from her grasp and in an instant both of Weiss's wrists were captured, practically crushed under the woman's grasp as Weiss was dragged back against the Faunus's chest and pulled into a choke hold. Right below her chin the White Fang's arm-guards began to glow and pulsate with power.

"No!" Weiss screamed, Glyphs's springing into existence and fading just as fast as they proved useless in granting her salvation as she thrashed against her much stronger captor.

"Run girl, get to the ship!" The Commander roared as she staggered back from her fellow White Fang.

"But sir!" The girl cried plaintively, arms outstretched as if to beg.

"You won't take any more from us Schnee!" The woman screamed, clutching Weiss tighter as her gauntlets surged to explode.

An explosive crack shot through the air and the Faunus holding Weiss lurched left, her entire body limp. As the glow of the gauntlets faded and Weiss felt the burns forming around her neck and wrist she half spun and pushed herself off the collapsing woman, kicking her back into the rubble so she landed face first in the dirt.

"Commander!" The smaller Faunus wailed, running past Weiss as she turned her gaze up on Ruby who was leaning against Crescent Rose. Its blade was facing backwards but Weiss could easily tell the girl had just used a sniper-round empowered shot to bludgeon the commander back into unconsciousness. Dragging herself back to her feet Weiss grasped Myrtenaster and spun around, Ruby at her side to look upon their fallen foe.

The Faunus woman had crashed back into the debris, her limp body half buried in broken stones and splintered wood as the smaller Faunus tried to shake her awake. Her mask had been split at some point during the exchange, half now missing and the rest barely covering one side of her face. With her mask broken she looked so much more... human, to Weiss. Her silver hair marked by blood hung limply over sharp features that reminded her of Winter's. She seemed to stir faintly for a moment, hands flexing as she seemingly tried to grasp at her surroundings to push herself up. She failed though, creaky and shaking body collapsing against the ground and looking as if in a delirium before slumping back into unconsciousness.

Weiss could still feel her sword in hand and she looked at the woman who'd just about ended her life. She took a single soft step forward, leaves crinkling under her steps. Weiss's mind was quiet as she stared down at the beaten woman's weathered features. 'What brought you here?' Something in her wondered.

Weiss's mind snapped back into gear as the small Faunus girl shot up in-front of her, fumbling with a rifle-sword as she desperately tried to force the heavy weight bullet in but found it jamming. Her head shot back and forth between her gun and the girls standing before her in growing hysteria, tears running down her cheeks. 'She's barely my age?' Weiss thought. She glanced at Ruby who seemed more upset than scared and maybe a little affronted at the girls poor treatment of her weapon, then there was a bark.

"Arf!"

The Faunus girls head shot to the side where Zwei sat, tail wagging as he looked up at her and panted. Then the dog sprung up from the ground and head butted the girl into unconsciousness.
Weiss looked to her side and found Ruby's silver eyes boring into her. They stayed like that for a moment before Weiss slipped Myrtenaster back in her sheathe and muttered, "Lets find something to tie them up with."

Chapter End Notes

There was some debate about whether to upload this and the next chapter as one as originally planned, but eventually the size made it seem like a good idea and its sort of a fifty fifty thing on the overall narrative, thanks go out again to Person With Many Aliases for all their advice and assistance with this story and I hope everyone enjoyed this latest upload, chapter 7 should be coming out later tonight/today depending on one's time-zone.
Chapter 7 Shouting Across the Divide

Saying that Yang had not made much headway in subduing Blake would be a fair, accurate and very annoying sentiment.

Yang threw herself left of another sword slash that carved a scar into one of the Forever Fall trees. She swung out with a left hook only for Blake to lean out of reach and she jumped back into the forest. While the black coated girl had stood her ground to fight that did not mean she'd drastically changed her style and tried to simply overpower Yang. 'A shame, then I would have won,' Yang mused as she sprinted after the girl. Pouncing at the Faunus Yang landed bare inches from her but had to limbo out of the way of Blake's cleaver swipe.

Yang could barely call what they were doing now fighting, to Yang fighting meant real, hard, concussive strikes. What they were doing was closer to dancing; each move close before being slipped around or redirect, each attack was lightning quick but lacking in power. Yang went in for a high kick but found her strike matched by Blake's own. Their feet tapped and beat against one another as they slid across the ground, trying to bypass the others guard and immediately being cut off. Fist and blades flew forwards but each strike was half made, redirected, dodged or quickly parried. Neither warrior fully willing to commit to an all out attack after having spent so much ammo and Aura in their last engagements.

Their clash moved to a break in the forest as they reached a rocky bluff, Blake's expression soured at the loss of the trees and bushes as cover for her hit and run style attacks. Yang grinned at the open area and for a time their battle went on with a continuous exchange of rapid fire blows, dodges and redirections. It was mind-numbingly frustrating for someone who relished the chance to fight with as few restraints as possible like Yang.

In truth it reminded her of those sparring sessions she'd had with the Malachite twins. The kind they loved because Yang had to ditch Ember Celica and restrain her strength to avoid obliterating the surrounding. It suited the girls, they didn't need to hold back much at all given their elegant flighty style of combat and simply due to not being as strong as Yang. She however couldn't put her whole self into a blow and had to be forever paranoid about where she was aiming lest she have to pay for something broken.

'Can't say it wasn't good practice though,' Yang mused as she blocked Blake's katana with her gauntlet, she leaned back and let it slash passed her slowly, still grinding and screeching against her golden bracelets. 'Damn it I can't let this go on!' Yang fumed, she lashed out with a right strike that shot over Blake's shoulder causing the other warrior to somersault backwards just fast enough to graze Yang's jaw with her pointed boots.

'Got you!' Yang thought as Blake's hands drifted from the ground and for one second she drifted through space unhindered by gravity nor supported by the earth. Yang threw her arms back and with a might bang flung herself forward. Aiming her gauntlets forward Yang put pressure on the triggers and unleashed a single bullets with a roar as her fist collided with Blake. Only to tear through the girl like smoke, grin not leaving her face Yang cast her gaze up and unloaded a surprise second shot at the dark haired woman above her that clanged against her cleaver. 'She blocked!? No it doesn't matter she's stuck jumping now and I can wear her out like thi-' Yang's thoughts were interrupted at the sudden sound of a snap followed by a gunshot.

Circling around Yang just barely got her left hand in front of black silk, and Aura strengthened slapped against her hand and neck. Then the gun shot again and spiralled around her neck until it snapped, completely taught as Blake heaved Yang into the sky causing her to gag at the sudden...
crushing pressure against her throat.

An unfamiliar sense of vertigo overtook Yang as she soared into the sky. Her eyes tensed and widened like they were about to pop out of her head. Yang pushed against the Aura infused cloth trapping her neck and hand but her senses had numbed as she reached the apex of her flight, staring at the world below while her feet floated above her head. It lasted only a moment though as Blake's forceful tug sent Yang lurching forward and hurtling towards the ground so fast the wind crashed against her ears like waves.

Yang threw back her one free hand to disperse the some of her gathering momentum when a deep electric buzz flared to life behind her. Yang had no time to react as a curved shining blade of purple energy smashed against her back, contorting her entire body just as she impacted against the ground with an explosion of earth shattering force. "Aaak!" Yang cried as the ground blew up in her face only for two sharp feet to slam against her back sending a painful crack echoing in Yang's senses as Blake jumped off of her before she could even consider making a grab for the Faunus.

As the dust began to settle on her frame Yang panted, sucking in deep breath after deep breath once the ribbon loosened from around her neck. Her entire body reverberated with the force of the impact and her back ached from where her opponent had slashed and kicked her. 'But I feel so awesome!' Yang silently screamed, her eyes had flashed red and she could feel her hearth thumping, blood pumping so hard it almost hurt. The blazing presence of her Aura swelled and thrummed in her chest and spread throughout her body.

It took all of Yang's concentration not to let her hair start to shine lest she reveal herself to her would be killer. Sneak attacks didn't sit well with Yang but using her Semblance's power boost to one-shot a deadly foe, that she was OK with, and she couldn't have Blake trying to run away after a display like that. 'But thanks to that attack I am more than charged enough to stomp anyone!' Yang thought gleefully, every muscle tensing and flexing in anticipation as she heard Blake's slow and deliberate footfalls approach her as the woman tugged at her ribbon in an attempt to pry it from Yang's neck. 'Not letting go, sorry,' she said without sincerity as the loosened noose slipped over her head Yang slipped her hand around and held it with all her strength ignoring Blake's faint tugs.

Gritting her teeth as though in pain Yang looked up from the small crater she'd been slammed into, 'Bleh my mouth tastes like one of Ruby's mud pies... hers were better,' Yang joked to herself.

"That attack won't have put someone like you down permanently but there's no way you can fight me now," Blake said simply, her voice was surprisingly smooth Yang thought. "I'm willing to wait until you're back on your feet but after that you need to head for Vale, if you come after me again..." She let the sentence hang there with all the finality of a threat but none of the heat or weight in the words Yang was used to, instead she sound tired and... unsure?

"That's pretty soft talk isn't it?" Yang asked, her throat still stung leaving her voice perhaps a baritone lower than it should have been. Blake merely gave her weapon another tug and Yang let Blake tug her arm forward but didn't release her hold on the weapon. Chuckling she winked at the dark haired woman and said, "Heh, sorry I don't give up easy."

"No, no you don't," Blake said softly, her cat ears were pressed against her skull and her posture spoke of exhaustion rather than victory. It was the best time to attack but Yang found herself, strangely uncomfortable with doing so. 'Ruby, just think of Ruby, catch Blake and even if they won't let me into Beacon she'll see I can become a Huntress without going and stop worrying.' The image of her and her sisters reunion spurred Yang forward, she pressed her free hand against the ground, dug her feet into the dirt and-
Blake's eyes shot up and from nowhere a hail of machine gun bullets shot through the air. Restricted by Yang's hold on her weapon Blake swung up her massive meat cleaver and deflecting each of the shot with several clangs. Looking over her shoulder Yang saw two White Fang soldiers burst from the foliage gun-blades blazing, the one on the right had particularly large tusks and the other a lizard tail that was cut down to half its length. Yang still had Blake's gun and the girl was understandably unwilling to abandon her weapon but Yang knew her opponent lacked the strength to free it from her grasp. The White Fang soldier shot towards Blake with the sort of speed Yang would have suspected from the Malachite twins which meant they weren't meagre pushovers... If they could see her coming anyway. 'No one takes my opponents out but me!' The duo lunged at Blake each one bringing down the swords for an overhead swing that Blake barely managed to defend against as she brought her cleaver up seconds before they'd have struck her head. Even then the combined strike brought the warrior to her knees as she strained against their combined assault, their blades sparking and screeching against one another.

Yang jumped to her feet, hair turning a wavy immaterial gold as she sent a wink towards Blake who gasped at the sight. Throwing back her free arm Yang punched out a powerful shotgun shot into the lizard White Fang's head that sent sprawling to the ground. The force of the blow dragged Yang and Blake back, Blake using the pull to slide through her attackers legs in a blur and knocking him to the ground. He tried to land on his hand to recover from the blow but Yang was already on him, dragging Blake behind her via the ribbon, only now noticing that the Faunus had it wrapped around her own wrist as well. Yang slammed her ribbon-wrapped fist into the tusked Faunus's stomach, launching him across the red grass field and sling-shooting Blake over her shoulder where-upon she slammed both feet into his stomach and slammed him into the ground with a resounding crack of stone.

Yang didn't know what Blake was going to do next and at this point it didn't matter, whatever fun she'd been able to drag from the fighter, whatever her confounding situation was, Blake was a criminal and Yang needed to catch her. With the image of Ruby burned into her mind Yang squeezed her left trigger and unloaded a round into the ground, Blake had perhaps sensed this and moved to block only to find her self flung into the air again as Yang leapt up with her shot, dragging Blake with her. Yang wrapped her hand around another few centimetres of ribbon and used it to drag Blake towards her in a flash.

Blake swung out her cleaver as she found herself hurtling towards the blonde so fast her world was a blur. Her swing struck against the Bounty Hunters golden bracelet with a might clang, forcing the blonde away from her and allowing Blake to drop a clone beneath herself to jump out of the blondes reach, but rather than attack the blonde let the force of Blake's attacker fling her away. It didn't help though, as the Huntress slammed against the ground with a crash and Blake found them both still bound together by Gambol Shroud, its hold on her wrist so tight jumping out of it with her Semblance was unlikely at best. 'And... I don't want to run again, or leave it behind,' She thought resolutely.

That was when Blake felt another pull and felt her sense of vertigo shift as she was weightlessly dragged through the empty sky like a dream where she was eternally falling only this time she was being spun at a sickening pace. Blake's insides felt like they were rebelling as they strained against the dizzying inertia and Blake tried to slip herself from the trap she'd found herself in. 'I can barely see!' She thought frantically as the world dissolved into a sickening red blur, with only the golden dot below her acting as a centre. Blake's frame quivered as she unleashed one of her clones in a desperate bid to replace herself with them to fly into the air and return for round three. However the breakneck speed she was being spun at and her exhaustion robbed the Faunus of focus and control so her clone was set hurtling into space instead of her, the bindings of Gambol Shroud around her wrist still painfully tight!
Blake felt another powerful tug on her wrist and the spinning gold dot seemed to shake for a moment as Blake found herself being dragged towards the spiralling Huntress, the sheer force of the push and pull leaving her body feeling like she was being used in a tug of war between a Nevermore and a Deathstalker. She tried to throw herself closer to the binding strip of cloth to regain control but the force crashing against her through sheer momentum slapped against her as hard as any physical blow.

Then Blake's entire world went inside out. Something loud reached her sensitive ears and the war a blur, her body went into a gangly free fall as she was swung down, Blake let out a cry of pain as she felt something pop in her shoulder, "Aah!" And in an instant the gold Huntress was in front of her, Blake couldn't even form a thought as she saw the ground rushing to meet her and then her world became an explosions of pain and sound as waves of dirt and stone exploded around her. Blake's entire body screamed as she met the ground, her bones shook as shock-waves of pain ran across her frame, the earth surged around her and she let out a muted cry of pain as the last of her breath escaped her lungs and she smacked rigidly against the earth, body quivering and stuck between numbed shock and blistering pain.

Blake's blurry vision saw the golden haired Huntress fade into existence above her as her Aura rushed to fix the damage with all the haste what scraps were left could and Blake felt some sense of feeling return to her, but what tiny wisps of strength still remained within her were intangible as her own clones. 'In the end, I can't run, and even my own power escapes me..' Blake thought, letting her entire body go limp and not even gasping as the blonde pressed her foot down on her chest to keep her in place as she drew her right bracelet back and met Blake's gold eyes with her own red ones.

Blake kept her eyes on up burning blonde who towered over her, the woman's body was lined with deep gashes and cuts from their fight, her shining red eyes almost reminiscent of a Grim's. She heard the whirr of the shotgun gauntlets and waited for the inevitable blow to hit. 'I'm so tired of running...'

"Damn..." Said the Huntress through clenched teeth. "I seriously don't have it in me to kill you after you wouldn't even deliver the finishing blow." She lifted her foot from Blake's chest, rolled back on her heels and shook out her shoulders as if to dismiss some dust or an errant insect.

"What?" Blake said, too numb and sore for even the slightest emotion to enter her voice.

"I'm letting you go, come on up you get," The Huntress answered cheerfully. Reaching down the blonde clasped Blake by the wrists and pulled the Faunus to her unsteady feet. She slipped Gambol Shroud's ribbon from her wrist and dropped the gun into Blake's shaking hands.

"Why would you do that, you had me, the reward, everything?" Blake asked, almost desperately. No human, said the White Fang, would ever show a scrap of honour or decency to a Faunus.

Slipping her hands behind her head the Huntress answered with an almost comical look of confusion on her features, "Like I said, you weren't going to kill me so I can't kill you, it wouldn't be right. I'm not even sure I could!" She grinned. "Besides, after everything we went through I just can't believe you did everything the news said you did."

"All we did was fight," Blake pointed out.

Grinning she said, "Can you name a better way to get to know someone? Name's Yang by the by, hah!" She crowed, casting her head back and with a toothy grin that made her look like she'd just heard the best joke in the world. Perhaps noticing her dumbstruck expression Yang said, "Relax Blake, I'm not going to change my mind, if you run I won't try to stop you, fairs fair."
Blake looked down at the grass then up at the girls now lilac eyes and a smile blossomed on her face as Gambol Shroud slipped from her hands. Then she began to grin, then Blake began to laugh, "Heh... hehe... hahahaha!" Clutching her head the Faunus sarcastically, in a voice relieved as it was strained with bitterness asked, "Where was someone like you when I was going up?"

"Sorry, there's only one of me, all custom parts, cannot be rebuilt or manufactured," Yang quipped. The blonde's calloused hands coming down on Blake's shoulder showed Yang understood her true meaning.

"Thank you, Yang. I can't thank you enough," Blake finally said. 'But where am I going to go now, no Beacon, no cities, even the wilds aren't safe.'

"Don't worry about it, though where are you going to go now? If you don't mind me asking," Yang said, waving airily at their torn up surroundings.

"I don't know, but somewhere far away, I'm good at running if nothing else," Blake answered dully.

"I wouldn't say just that, you've also got a mean swinging arm," Yang said, popping her neck and rubbing her fist against her back.

"Thanks, you've got a solid punch for whatever its worth," Blake said. Gathering herself and her weapons up she moved towards the foliage when a painful hissing sound struck her sensitive ears and a thin wall of ice exploded up in front of her. Blake fell backwards, turning her gaze towards Yang she expected confidence and smugness from the bounty hunter at fooling her prey. However she saw only confusion on the girls face as she turned to face some oncoming footsteps arms primed and ready to strike at the new presence.

Blake forced herself to stand and saw as a white haired girl in a dress and tiny jacket of glittering blues and whites fit for royalty march into the clearing. She had a Dust loaded fencing swords and her long white hair was tied in a side ponytail. 'Schnee!' Some part of her screamed, an almost instinctive scowl spreading on her face.

"Ruby!" Yang shouted as another girl in red jogged onto the scene, a large sniper rifle scythe held in her tiny arms.

"Yang what are you doing? She's the bad guy!" The girl yelled.

Yang jumped between Blake and the two new contenders and waved her hands. "No you've got it all wrong," she said. "Blake's cool, like ice cold but in a nice way. She's a good guy," The blonde finally said with a resolution Blake felt was completely unfitting for barely knowing someone.

"No she's not!" The Schnee heiress roared, a spinning blue glyph swirling to life beneath her feet as the tip of her blade began to glow red.

"Um Weiss," Ruby said uncertainly, the sights of her weapon straying from where they'd once been targeted at the centre of Blake's own chest. "Maybe we should listen? I mean Yang's my sister and I trust her."

"You don't know these people like I do Ruby, neither of you do!" Weiss snapped.

"Oh please, the SDC is as dirty as they come, everyone knows that," Yang interrupted.

"The Whitefang has been at war with my family since I was a child," The heiress said. Her voice trembled with what Blake thought was rage. "Family, friends, civilians, no one is above being
targeted by them, not even children and she's one of the worst! I know what my father has done is wrong, I know our family name is mud and of that lives have been ruined because of us. I wanted to change that, I want to become a huntress and try to work off even the smallest margin of that debt, but her!” Weiss slashed forward with her blade, flames thrashing at the tip. "She's a monster, no matter what my family has done she's killed innocent people. People I loved!"

The clearing was frozen, nobody moved. It was Ruby who spoke first, her quiet voice wavering and uncertain. "Weiss, didn't you say what happened was when you were a kid? Could she have even done it then?"

"Stop trying to defend her, even the other White Fang members gave her up!"

"Oh that is bul!-" Yang froze as Blake clasped her shoulder and gentle pushed the blonde to the side. "Blake?"

"Thank you Yang, but... I can handle this," Blake said calmly, stepping forward she locked gazes with the other girl. Weiss's eyes were shaking, her entire body rigid and her entire frame radiated tension and rage. 'I know that look,' Blake thought. She'd seen it on her own face so many times. The Faunus sighed, it was time to stop running.

Weiss opened her mouth but Blake interrupted her, tossing Gambol Shroud to the ground she said, "Kill me then." The clearing froze again and even Weiss looked unbalanced, gaping in shock.

"Blake," Yang hissed.

"Its fine Yang," Blake answered stepping towards the other girls sword. It was amazing how familiar the girl looked despite never having seen her before, 'Is it the expression? Are we two sides of the same coin? Honestly, do I really want that to be my last thought?'.

"I didn't commit the crimes the White Fang accuse me of, but I am guilty," she said firmly. "I stood by and watched a peaceful group give way to zealously and murder. I was silent as they started to speak about assaults and bombs instead of protests and marching." She didn't break eye contact with Weiss as she walked closer.

"I even helped on missions, I was an active member of the White Fang, always convincing myself we were still doing good, lying to myself and saying no one innocent would get hurt and that we hadn't become every bit as terrible as the evil we claimed to fight," She said. Blake could feel her entire posture go limp with defeat. "I was a coward, to afraid to walk away, to scared to speak up until there was no chance of changing their path. I left the White Fang but I refuse to keep running from my past; looking at it now, I'm not sure I could even begin to try and fix things..." She looked Weiss dead in the eyes and simply said, "So kill me Weiss, get your revenge but promise me, promise me one thing Weiss," Blake said.

"What?" The girl asked uncertainly, almost stepping back and out of her stance.

"You said you knew what your father did was wrong, so promise me you're going to end it. His and the SDC's crimes," Blake elaborated. "What's happened is a war, just like you said. The SDC and the White Fang have forgotten, or just stopped caring that the people hurt most by their actions... are innocent children."

The blade-tip sat on her heart and Blake waited. She watched as Weiss's expression shifted from shock, rage, to barely restrained despair as though she were about to sob. Then finally the rage came back and the girls grip on her weapon tightened and she bit down on her lip. In a single second she brought the sword back and thrust!-
Right over Blake's shoulder with a cry and unleashing a stream of fire into the sky.

Turning her head Blake watched as a small Nevermore, only about half her size was consumed in flames and cawed its last as it fell.

"Hey watch where you're shooting!" Yang shouted as she ducked out of the way of the attack.

"As if I could kill you after all that," Weiss hissed, no longer meeting Blake's eyes. "Besides, Ruby's right, you are too young."

"Uh guys, Grim, lots of Grim, like from everywhere," Ruby interrupted, Blake could hear her gun cranking and sighing as it shifted into a thick almost club-like form. Ruby's words were followed by a sudden cascade of loud sniper fire as she begun to let loose unto the forest. In the distance Blake could make out the savage howls of their would be killers.

"We have to get out of here," She and Weiss said in unison.

"You guys came here on the other airship right? Still got it?" Yang asked.

"We have it, though there's some unconscious White Fang in it," Ruby noted.

"Lead the way sis!" Yang cheered. Blake's eyes full upon the two downed White Fang members who had stalked them so far into the forest with uncertainty.

"I got'em!" Yang said. Running to their side she slung both men over her shoulders and took off after Ruby who continued to shoot as she ran backwards.

"Ruby just let me lead the way!" Weiss shouted.

"Blake come on!" Yang called.

A strange warmth in her chest Blake shot off after the three girls towards their escape.

Yet somehow Blake knew she wasn't running any more.
Machine gun fire, shot gun rounds, the boom of sniper bullets and the hiss of ice echoed throughout the Forever Fall Forests. It was accompanied by the snarls, roars, screeches and growls of juvenile Grim that surged through the forest at every angle.

"Move! Move!" Yang shouted as she fired a shot through a charging Beowolf, all while balancing two grown men on her shoulders. A massive Ursa burst onto the scene before her and Yang unloaded another powerful blast that soared through the air like a firework and blew the Grim's head clean off.

Blake flung Gambol Shrouds blade into the air and tore the the neck of a dive bombing Nevermore and snapped the ribbon and black back into her hands in almost the same instant, the decaying Grim falling from the air behind her. She glanced at her fleeing companions and shouted, "Will the ship still be there!?"

It was Ruby who answered, "Yeah we left a guard there!" The brunette swung her now unfolded Gun Scythe and after swiftly pulling the lever down launched herself forward, freeing a small horde of Beowolves off their feet with her scythes blade in the process.

"Do any of you even have the slightest idea how to fly a Bullhead properly!?" Weiss screamed as she trailed a stream of ice behind them to confound their foes and judging by the growls and yelps behind them it was working.

"I probably could, but I think Blake's got that down for us, right!?!" Yang shouted over the enraged roar of an Ursa as she leapt onto its head and kicked it into its smaller kin.

"I can fly it!" Blake said simply, throwing a clone forward and to be torn open by some charging Beowolves while she leapt over their heads, Gambol Shroud tearing through the beasts necks as she flew by.

"Great!" Ruby called and in the distance Blake could make out the vague outline of a dark steel ship. "Weiss!" Ruby shouted. "Can you still do any big attacks, like a fire ball or something?"

"One or two!" Weiss shouted back.

Yang spoke next, her mind connecting the dots as quickly as Blake's own as she said, "Ooh I get it, Ruby and I on one side, you on the other and Blake driving! Nice plan sis!" With that their quartet burst into a battle-scared forest clearing. The ship sat on its short pronged feet and there was a small pile of dead Grim turning into black smoke around the vessel.

A chorus of roars exploded from the surrounding forests and Blake spied new assailants from every angle, hundreds of Grim burst from every tree their demonic cries enough to make the earth feel like it was shaking were as Blake jumped into the ship. Ignoring the unconscious and partially frozen White Fang soldiers Blake dived for the controls. 'Oh thank goodness they left it ready for an emergency take off!' Blake thought as the wings jets revved up and she pulled the control stick back with jarring force in a bid to escape the onslaught of Grim.

Behind her Blake heard the roar of Burn Dust blitzing a horde of anguished Grim and the frantic discharge of guns.
"Shit I'm out!" Yang spat.

Before the blonde could begin searching the ship Blake kicked Gambol Shroud to Yang and yelled, "Take mine!" Yang's cry of thanks and the sudden wave of Aura infused machine gun-fire hit Blake's ears as she yanked the lever and slammed down on the emergency throttle catapulting them into the sky and leaving a wailing series of animal-like bellows of fury behind.

As well as a much closer series of less beastly cries from the hull of the ship.

"Aah!"

"Woah, hello!"

"Hahaha, we did it!"

Blake shoulders slacked and she brought the Bullhead to level out well above the forest and set a more gentle but still swift pace away from the congregation of Grim. Behind her the cabin doors hissed as they were pulled shut and her three unexpected companion marched into the cockpit cheering and pumping their fists with glee and relief.

Blake allowed a small smile of her own to appear which turned into a more cocky grin as Yang clapped her on the shoulder and dropped Gambol Shroud in her lap with a wink and hushed 'Thank you'. From there the blonde seemed to bundle her sister up in a hug and Weiss simply collapsed in the co pilot seat, sword in its sheathe and her hand against her head. Then everything got worse.

"Arf!"

It was a dog, a corgi to be exact, a brown top half and white on the bottom. It had its awful paws pressed up against Blake's legs, it stinking dog breath assaulting four of her five senses as it panted up at her. It let out another baleful bark and Blake lurched just a little in her seat, glaring down at the animal even as she tried to get the ship stable again.

Unaware as to its insulting presence the dog pressed up against her leg again and yipped. This time Blake was ready and instead of lurching away or maybe doing the sensible thing and hurling it from the Bullhead she looked over her shoulder at Yang a frown on her lips. "You have a dog?" Blake asked slowly.

"Uh yeah, heh, sorry, did I not tell you that?" Yang asked, a half amused half nervous smile on her lips.

"That's Zwei, he's super sweet!" Ruby said, rushing over to the canine and wrapping him up in her arms.

This of course only brought his insulting presence closer to Blake's face and the dog leaned over to her and continued its incessant yapping, tongue smacking its chops as it eyed her up and tried for a taste. "Please just, keep it away from me when I'm driving," Blake said as politely, but tersely as she could.

Seemingly unaffected by her tone Ruby happily answered, "Sure thing! I wanted t keep checking out all the cool stuff we found here anyway, come on Zwei!" Ruby spun on her feet and remove the dog from Blake's presence.

"You mean the crates?" Yang asked from her position leaning against the cockpit entrance with her arms folded. Blake had no idea why Bullhead's had rear-view mirrors except for the vanity of the pilots, or to make sure one's passengers weren't messing about.
"We found some hidden compartments as well, they had Dust, food, Lien, water, even a few futons," Weiss said. Her tone was a weary one, like someone who was physically half asleep but mentally still wired and wishing that weren't the case.

Humming a little Blake nodded and said, "That's quite common, w-, the White Fang customises Bullheads if they have them long enough. Usually that means reinforcing them, adding weapons, more storage compartments. This one is bigger than usual and given I heard they were planning on evacuating Vale to avoid the police crackdown its no wonder they were well stocked."

"Dang, mind if I grab a few Burn rounds before we get back to... Huh," Yang said, trailing off quizzically as an awkward silence descended upon the cabin except for the muted roar of the engines as the three girls all stared openly at Blake. All while the filthy dog just kept panting and making grumbling growling noises for attention.

Leaning back against the padded seat Blake forced a small grin and said, "So where can I drop you girls off? I hope you don't mind if I hold onto the Bullhead though. I'm sure the police have enough to worry about without this messing with their paperwork."

Ruby spoke first, her voice lacking in its previous jubilance as she whispered, "You're not coming with us?"

"Still a wanted criminal Ruby," Yang said simply, an annoyed sigh accompanying her words. "I guess somewhere near one of the check points would be good for us," She muttered.

"And you Weiss?" Blake asked, the name falling awkwardly from her lips.

The white haired girl merely groaned, slapping her hands over her eyes she leaned forward in her chair, throat rumbling. Finally she rose up and sighed, "I don't know... I suppose back to Atlas now that Beacons off the table, tch," She hissed. "Maybe I'll get a job as my father "little assistant" she said in a mockingly sweet voice.

"Aren't you the heiress?" Blake asked, arching a single eyebrow at the girl, as she continued her lazy flight across the Forever Fall Forest, vaguely in the direction of Vale's outer perimeter.

"Only because Winter was cut off after joining the military and he's done the same to me as well until I come crawling back, the- the fiend!" She seethed, slapping a blue booted foot against the floor and slapping her knees.

"So how were you planning on changing things?" Yang asked. "Seems like he has pretty strong views on his daughters place in the family business."

"Huh, you have no idea," Weiss muttered, rubbing her temple. "In truth," She said, "I don't know what I planned... Become a Huntress, become successful and well known, do good and grow in influence and... I guess try to make him stop?"

Blake sympathised, 'Seems I'm not the only one with a goal but no path for how to reach it.'

"Well you can hang with me if you like, or maybe hit the great out doors with Blake," Yang said half jokingly. "I mean, it doesn't seem like he'll let things slide for you in Vale and well, sorry Blake, not much I can really offer."

"Its not your fault and its not as though I 'wasn't' a member for most of my life, even if the first half of that was peace marches and things," Blake said. She cast her gazer out through the window and tried to ignore the forest below for the orange tinted sky marked by the setting sun.
"What did make you leave?" Ruby asked suddenly, have wondered back into the cabin and dropped to the floor. Thankfully keeping that dog contained in her arms as it 'arooed' and barked in dull confusion.

The cabin was awkwardly silent again and it almost made Blake chuckle at the absurdity of it all. 'One doesn't get to relax in a Bullhead piloted by a former terrorist very often do they?'

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to," Yang said in a tone that gave the impression she'd covered for her sisters or her own bluntness more than once.

"It is a valid question though," Weiss said, something like neutrality in her voice.

"Its a fair question I guess," Blake said with a suppressed sigh as she pulled back on the speed just a bit more. She needed to know where she was going before trying to get into Vale but this seemed more important.

Eyes and hands drifting over the console in a silent bid for distraction Blake began to speak. "It shouldn't have been such a large thing. I always avoided missions where I thought someone might allow it to harm civilians or tried to stop them and this one it... It shouldn't have been able to hurt anyone," She said chest tightening and breath turning into soft rasps as tension ran through her frame.

Blake was surprised to see Yang squat down at her to rest her hand on Blake's arm that was so tense it left her veins pressing up against the skin. "Want me to drive?" She said softly.

"Thanks but I'll be fine, a distraction will make it quicker," Blake said, tugging at her recently purchased and now very dirty scarf to let some more air into her lungs. It was a meaningless gesture but a comforting one.

Blinking rapidly Blake continued her tale, "I was with my partner and our job was to raid and destroy a shipment of Dust. Dust mined by ill-treated and poorly compensated Faunus labourers from outside the Kingdoms jurisdiction," Blake said the last word with as much derision as her tired voice could. "But it was different than I expected, not the robot guards or the mech, those were simple."

"I'm sure there's a few manufacturers in Atlas that would be rather upset with that review," Weiss said with a sarcastic chuckle.

Blake shrugged, "Shoddy things really," The brief respite of levity didn't last long though and Blake felt her ears press against her skull as she continued. "There was a civilian crew on the train, they weren't in the briefing but my partner still wanted to plant the charges. With them being so close to the Dust they'd ruin the train the line, make a powerful statement that no resource gained through such means would make it to Atlas... But it would kill all those people," Blake whispered.

"I... I told him that too and he... I don't know what's worse, the fact he didn't seem to care I said it, or how casually he dismissed all those lives." Blake's tone grew firmer and while her arms relaxed her hold on the throttle was firmer a she continued. "I couldn't let that happen so I got away from him, cut the train car and ran off... and I've been running ever since."

A silence hung in the Bullhead's cockpit for a time, only interrupted by the various little beeps of the console, the engines outside and Ruby's dog snuffling about. Blake felt Yang's hand on her shoulder and she heard Ruby take a breath but then Weiss cut in with a loud, "So that's what happened to the train!"
Bale couldn't stop a little snort of laughter from escaping and it seemed neither could Ruby or Yang. Finally and in a more sombre tone Blake asked, "So what happened to it?"

Weiss shrugged and said, "It was found about half a day later and looking like someone with a grudge against trains had decided to work it over as an example to all the others. Beyond that, nothing much beyond ruined tracks and no leads."

"That sounds about right," Blake murmured.

"That's so unfair though!" Ruby hollered from the back of the cockpit, jumping to her feet and letting the corgi run wild on the floor as the girl stared at her clenched fists. Before they could do any more than look confusedly at the girl Ruby continued, this time in full on speed mode. "I mean you were fighting for a good reason, why did he and so many other people have to go and ruin it? Why'd you have to fight in the first place aren't the Grim enough!? And how is it fair you're being blamed for their crimes when all you did was stop one!" She bellowed. Then the girl immediately retracted in on herself, fingers twiddling as she mumbled, "Well and helped with a few others but no one innocent got hurt so its OK."

"... Thank you, Ruby, but there's not much I can do about it now," Blake said. "Besides, with this Bullhead and the fuel I can make it a good distance from the White Fang and their violence. Even if they did confess I wasn't who they claimed I was, I did still serve the White Fang."

"Though I imagine the hunt for you would be lowered down the priority list if it turned out you weren't responsible for what they said you were," Weiss said contemplatively.

Blake felt her eyes shoot wide open as the idea sent her synapses sparking and it seemed she wasn't the only one.

Ruby stepped up behind her seat and asked, "So can you contact any of the White Fang that were evacuating from here?"

"Yes, yes I can Blake said breathlessly, "I even picked up the pass codes from a source."

Yang giggled at her side and said, "Engineered public confession anyone?"

The Bullhead now hung in the sky practically immobile and held in place by Yang's inexperienced but evidentially studied skills. The flat consoles radio hissed and buzzed at Weiss while Blake sat at her side whispering codes into the former singers ears. Ruby and Blake were also fiddling with the microphones wires as they tried to pick up on the sub-channel. Weiss had two digits pressed against her throat to force her rough voice a little lower again just in case.

Finally the radio crackled and a tense male voice came in over the line, "Seven Ground zero, we're six nine, anyone feeling me on this thing?"

Seeing Blake and Ruby nod, the latter of whom gave her two thumbs, up Weiss forced a little uncertainty into her voice and readied to respond. "Ten, uh... Air black, we're zero one with wounded, are we alon-"

The radio cut out with a violent crackle and for a moment Blake feared she'd been uncovered before with a quick buzz it came back even clearer than before. The man on the other side quickly spat, "Dammit newbie don't talk like that till we know the lines secure-"

"Sorry!" Weiss answered hurriedly.
Sighing and shushing the curious voices around him the voice came through again, "Now what's this about injured? I need to talk to the Commander, you were in her ship right? What happened out there!?"

"What didn't happen!?!" Weiss said back, forcing a frantic squeak into her voice. Pressing herself closer to the serrated metal speaker Weiss let the rehearsed words tumble out of her. "We went after Belladona but it turns out the Schnee Heiress hitched a ride on the base of our ship-" Weiss actually winced at the sudden explosion of exclamations and cursing rang out from the speakers.

"What the fuck was she doing there?! Where's Commander Rex!?!" The White Fang on the other end asked.

"No idea why she was here," Weiss said carefully, "But she had a Huntress with her and they attacked the Commander." The other line seemingly went dead as a sense of dread seemingly spread through the crowd. It was strange to think the woman who'd tried to kill her so well regarded by others that she'd be mourned. Speaking quickly Weiss continued, "She won the fight but was injured, I've treated her wounds though, I'm sure she'll be fine she's just a bit beaten up and tired!"

"How's her Aura?" The man asked and for a moment Weiss fumbled before Blake shoved a Scroll in front of her face. Scanning it Weiss sounded out the numbers, "seven... no eight, its in the red, but she's breathing there's no more blood!"

"Oh thanks the gods, look relax newbie, its fine, if her Auras like that it means she'll recover soon enough. How about you and the lieutenants?" He asked.

Glancing at the Scroll again Weiss said, "They're at Nine and twelve I think. They got Belladona but got swarmed by Grim on the way back to the ship. I'm not hurt, well I sting a little but the Commander said to stay inside and to run if things got bad. We all got out OK though!"

She added some nervous gasps in for effect and was pleased to hear the man on the other side soften his tone again. Granted he still seemed a bit snide to Weiss but more in what she guessed was meant to be perhaps a teasing elder sibling way. "And with the freaking Schnee Heiress, hot damn, just breath easy now newbie you're doing fine. You holding firm to the controls right? Eyes on the road, or air as the case may be?"

Weiss froze for a moment, pushing the microphone away as Blake whispered in her heard. Words revived Weiss said, "Uh, yes, sorry I'm sort of hovering right now, its... hard without the Commander helping."

"It always is but just chill, we may have been ousted faster than planned but with this coup our few losses in the escape are gonna seem like a small price to pay. We have the old bastard Schnee's daughter!?!" He cheered, his proclamation met with a resounding series of roars and claps.

Weiss balked at the man's celebration only to find Ruby's hand slipping into her own and Blake's hand on her shoulder. The Faunus girl, squeezed her shoulder softly and Weiss could feel Yang's eyes on her and calmed her nerves.

As the din died down she said, "Yeah its... its pretty amazing all right."

"Amazing?! This could mean an end to the whole damn thing! If nothing else it'd be a harsh lesson to Schnees but if we play this right we could drag him and his family from their throne in Atlas! Why aren't you more excited, you're gonna be a hero!"
"Its... Look, nothing, nothing, but we have one of our own tied up in the back here and I don't even know why. I mean if Blake Belladonna did so much for us why did we attack her?"

"Honestly, weren't you listening when we got briefed?" He said with a chuckle.

"I think I was practising in the ship, was this at last weeks meeting?"

"Belladonna's not some super Cell leader, I'm not even sure she was a White Fang, a Schnee agent meant to spy on us or just an idiot who got in the way. You see, a while back she ruined one of our biggest operations and actually managed to get away. Then a few days later one of our main camps gets wiped off the face of the fucking map! So yeah, we threw her to the public after failing to catch her ourselves. I think the people up top figured even if she was an Atlas or Schnee agent they'd rather kill her than let the fact they hired a Faunus to spy on us rebels, after all, that way they don't have to pay us."

"That sounds about right," Weiss rumbled, her annoyance and bitter tone entirely unaffected by her voice acting skill.

"Thank you, that's all I needed to hear," Weiss heard a faint click on the other side of the radio as if the speaker had just cracked a pencil.

"Who are you!?"

Weiss had no particular plan for this part of the speech but she heard Blake mutter, "Errants" followed by Ruby shouting, "Heroes!" and Yang chuckled adding "Badasses". Remembering a story from her childhood and relishing the look on her father face if he heard her she smirked and added, "Knights," And then she hung up. A second later Blake disconnected Yang's Scroll from the console and held it in almost quivering hands.

"Weiss... Thank you, even if this doesn't wipe my record clean I... at least I know I won't be anyone's sacrifice," Blake said softly.

Weiss rubbed her sore throat and smiled up at the other girl as she flicked off the speaker and Ruby disengaged the radio with a flick of a switch. The ship began edging forward again under Yang's helm-ship and Weiss said, "It was no problem. Though if you want to thank me, maybe you can show me how to fly this thing later?"

Blake stared at her, golden eyes almost painfully wide as she asked, "You want to come with me?"

Weiss half met Blake's gaze and half looked out the front window upon the glistening horizon and let out a breath. "I want to see more of Remnant than just what my father wishes and I want to understand this world and its people better. Maybe I can do that out here, expand my horizon? Besides," She chuckled, "I don't think I want to be in Vale or any cities some time."

"So yes, if its not too much trouble I'd like to tag along, for awhile at least," Weiss said. Her eyes fell on the downed White Fang in the back of the ship and she quickly added, "After we drop those three off somewhere they'll be picked up by the proper authorities."

"Only three huh?" Yang said with some jokey mirth and a toothy smile, "And the fourth one?"

"She's only about our age anyway, and this feels like the kind of day for re-evaluating one's stances."

"Thank you," Blake uttered.
Before things could get too emotional, or silently awkward, Yang cut in and said, "Yeah I have a place we can drop these guys and the girl too. Blake you know a flight path into Vale right?"

"Yes, we should be hidden, at least long enough to make a drop and run," Blake answered as she slid behind the control.

Yang dropped into the navigators seat, making the seat puff out air as she dropped into it like a stone before bringing up a map on the panel with a tap of her fingers. "Say, would you guys mind telling me where you'll be hitting up on this Air Trip? Once I have Ruby at Beacon I might track you guys down, the Vale scene's getting kinda dull and my boss is preoccupied with his own junk right now."

"I'd be happy to have you, though as far as I know we don't exactly have a destination in mind," Blake said.

Weiss looked over at Ruby and saw the girl had slouched against the wall in a seeming loss of energy. However her eyes were focussed, not quite like in the battle but instead with a strange sort of wide eyed wonder and energy to them. "I agree with Blake, I wouldn't mind you coming along Yang, but what about Ruby?"

Yang smiled at her sister, motioning Blake to the map on the screen before rising from her chair and marching to Ruby's side and wrapping an arm around her shoulder. "I'm still gonna visit and call whenever I can but Vale's wearing on me a bit and I'd like to see a bit more of the world if I can. I've got some travel ideas if you're interested and I mean, how often does an opportunity like this come up?"

"You're right," Ruby said cheerfully, looking up at her sister and smiling she said, "That's why I want to come too!"

Ruby felt Yang tense for a moment, sucking in a silent breath before she simply said, "No," slipping out of her chair Yang began leading her into the cabin and away from prying ears, as much as they could be given there was perhaps a metre between then but Ruby supposed it was at least a little more private.

"But Yang-" Ruby started, she knew her tone was somewhere between a groan of annoyance and plaintive but didn't really care.

Yang's hand cut through the air and Ruby's protests as she said, "Ruby I thought we discussed this, we did discuss this, you're going to Beacon."

"I already missed the airship," Ruby retorted.

"Ozpin said he'd be understanding and I doubt missing one day has forever ruined your chances at Beacon," Yang said firmly.

"Maybe he will, maybe he won't but what if I don't want to go to Beacon any more?!" Ruby shouted. For as long as Ruby could remember Yang had looked out for her, protected and tried to nurture and encourage her, and Ruby had always stuck close to her sister; she could scarcely recall shouting at the older blonde except in the shrieking cries of play and laughter had always come of it. But as she stared down Yang's wide lilac eyes, saw a guilty frown spreading across Yang's face as her entire face seemed to hollow out Ruby worried they'd not laugh about this any time soon.

"Ruby..." Yang said in a breathy whisper, "Please, don't throw away your dream over me, I've already caused you enough troubl-" Ruby placed her palm over Yang's mouth muffling the taller
"Nope, nope, nope!" Ruby said, shaking her head rapidly with some of her enthusiasm returning. Pulling back Ruby smiled up at Yang and said, "I don't want to hear about you thinking this is all somehow your fault, or your responsibility, or about anything that happened when we were little, this is a right here right now conversation my dear sister Yang."

Yang leaned back a little, raising an eyebrow as if re-evaluating Ruby before she shrugged and said, "Fine, but that doesn't really take away from my point, and even if it does, why the change? You know I'm not going to accept shyness as an answer, or wanting to help me out."

"And why not?" Ruby asked, standing up on the tips of her toes to better meet Yang's eyes, she still failed. "I mean about the staying with you part not the shyness thing."

Yang threw her arms out and shouted, "Because you shouldn't be ruining your future to try and look out for me, I'm not worth it!"

"But I am?" Ruby said, drawing the words out as she spoke.

Shaking her head Yang said, "That's different and you know it, Ruby everything I ever wanted for you is at Beacon, everything you ever wanted."

"Hm, so what if Beacon isn't what I want any more?" Ruby asked quizzically. At Yang's confused blink Ruby sighed and pulled her sister into a hug, resting her head against Yang's chest and feeling her heartbeat like a jack hammer. "Maybe we don't agree who's worth looking out for but I just want you to know, your my sister and I love you, and I will always think you're worth it."

"Ruby," Yang started only for Ruby to squeeze her tighter.

"Let me finish," Ruby said quietly. "You've always been there for me, and I know you want to do what's best for me now, but maybe I want and what's best for me is different now than it was when I was younger. I mean, its like I was telling Zwei earlier, I want to be a hero, I want to make the world a better place, I know its unfair and unkind sometimes, that's why I wanna help make it better and now, maybe Beacon doesn't feel like that's the best path for me."

Before Yang could answer Ruby stepped back, spinning on her heels she threw her arms out wide and said, "I mean, look at what we've done today Yang, look at the awesome people we got to meet and think about all the good this could do! Now, don't get me wrong, I am fond of you," Ruby said with an impish smile as she held a hand out as if to stall and protests from her sister who was looking at her curiously but, Ruby hoped, with something like a sense of intrigue. "Its not just about you Yang, its not just about me, or Weiss, or Blake, or Beacon, its about all of it and so much more! Think about how much we could learn if we took this airship and just flew! I mean really flew, like, going from one end of Remnant to the other, think about all the people we could meet, all the Grim we could fight, all the days we could save, or even nights, you know, I'm flexible," Ruby said, smiling as she heard Yang impulsively let out a tiny chuckle.

"So I play no part in this?" Yang asked half with a shrug.

"Of course you do, but its not just you, I mean... I know you were planning on looking for Uncle Qrow and dad," Ruby said, not quite meeting Yang's eyes as she spoke.

"And how'd you figure that out?" Yang asked, sighing in resignation and sliding her hand down her face with a quiet groan.

"Yang I might be younger than you but I'm not stupid-"
Before she could even blink Ruby felt Yang's hands clamp down on her shoulder as her sister looked her in the eyes and said gravely, "I have never thought you were stupid Ruby, not once."

"Sorry just... I know how much you try to be there for me and its not like I can't look after myself a lot of the time, I mean, just look at today!"

"Yes, you had one job, to get on an airship," Yang said with some mirth, a tiny smirk forming on her lips.

"Well I still ended up on an airship technically, twice even!" The sisters chuckled for a moment but Ruby could feel the tension in her chest, like scrunched up paper and Yang still looked wired and worried. Finally Ruby sighed and said, "Look Yang, I know its been killing you not being able to be around me more, I know how much you must hate it that dad and Uncle Qrow are missing and how much it sucks that if you weren't looking out for me you'd be out there looking for them because I feel exactly the same way! There our family Yang and I want to find them as well, I want to help rather than be a burden to you."

"Ruby I've never thought of you as a burden, not even for a second," Yang said, catching Ruby's hands and rubbing them in her own.

"Maybe, but if I'm not a burden I'm still not much of a help, and that's what I want to be, I want to help, I want to find our family and I want to stay with you and see more of Remnant than just one little corner of it. If you're still worried about Beacon I'm still too young anyway I can always go back later or qualify some other way, but right now, there's stuff more important to me than school. So please," Ruby said, slipping her hands around Yang's and cradling her sisters burnt and work weary hands in her own while meeting her sisters gaze dead on, "Lets see what's the rest of Remnants got in store for us, together."

The silence held as the two sisters stared into each others eyes before Yang finally blinked, her soft lilac eyes shining brighter than they'd seemed to in ages as she sighed, leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Ruby's head before burying her in a hug and whispering, "All right, we'll find our family together, but you promise me Ruby, you promise me you'll look out for yourself out there no matter what, I can't lose you."

Ruby returned her sisters hold and mumbled, "Only so long as it means you aren't in trouble too, otherwise I'm going to help you, and our friends."

Yang let out a tiny hiccup and said, "That's the best I'm going to get isn't it? Heh, I suppose that's why you're my little sister though, fine we'll look out for each other, Zwei and our new friends... That is," She said more loudly and looking over towards the cockpit, "If our new friends don't mind," Yang finished.

Ruby turned her head and saw Weiss and Zwei staring at them quite openly as the former seemingly dabbing at her eyes with a hanky while holding Zwei in her lap; Blake was less obvious, but the girls hyper focussed stare on the rear view mirror was hard to miss, only for her eyes to dart back down upon being noticed. Face burning so red it positively stung Ruby whipped up her hood and started mumbling to herself, "Oh gods, why didn't we close the door!?" Yang's affectionate head pat and Zwei being released to jump around her ankles helped a little, but not much.

"You OK sis?" Yang whispered.

"Fine, fine, just need a minute," Ruby said, picking up Zwei and cuddling him. "I'm fine, really, just a bit embarrassed OK?"
"All right," Yang said slowly, patting her sisters shoulder as she strolled towards the cockpit, passing Weiss as she did so.

"I think I need to make a call before we leave Vale, or at least leave a message for someone," Weiss said, staring at a particularly elegant Scroll embezzled with the Schnee family sigil surrounding the tiny devices camera.

Yang let out a big huff and began flexing her arms as she said, "Yeah I need to make a call or two as well, least of all to get these three picked up, think we're close enough yet Blake?"

"We'll be nearing the Western Harbour soon, so we should be in easy range of the CTT towers but you'll need to be quick, I don't want to be in the city longer than twenty minutes if I can avoid it," Blake answered.

"Cool, that should be enough time for me to get everything ready," Yang answered as she sagged into the copilots seat with a groan. "I don't think I've ever felt so freaking tired," She thought, lazily pulling her battered Scroll from her hip pouch and staring up at the dull grey ceiling, an image she'd probably have to get used if she was going to be living in the airship for awhile. 'Still, it's a bit roomier than the storage locker... But then if you add three people and a dog... Oh whatever I can crunch the numbers later.'

"Its probably better you let her come with us," Blake said quietly, not as though she was nervous but simply with the intent to keep her words between the two of them instead of every occupant on the ship.

"Why?" Yang asked, spinning on her seat to better stare at the other girl.

"If, when, these three are taken in chances are they'd get a message out to their allies and the whole White Fang would know who's responsible for the sudden damage to their presence in Vale," Blake said simply, casting a side long glance at Yang but never truly letting her eyes stray from the skies before her as she continued. "Even if she's safe at Beacon the moment she left she'd have a target painted on her back, at least for awhile anyway, the White Fang doesn't have the numbers to keep up a hunt over something like that for long but still, better safe than sorry."

"Screw me," Yang muttered, resisting the urge to slap herself over such an over sight, however much damage they'd inadvertently done to the White Fang they hadn't magically defeat the whole organisation, of course they'd still be a threat, 'And Ruby would be dealing with them alone...' She thought. "Well that's just another reason to get in and out of here quick and not come back for a good long time right?"

Blake nodded and said, "Agreed, though... where did you want to go after this, I wasn't kidding when I said I didn't have a plan beyond go far, far away and Weiss seems similarly direction-less."

Yang rested her chin on her hands, spinning on her seat she turned to spy Weiss and saw her talking into her Scroll, the word 'Winter' hit her ears and Yang immediately gave the girl her privacy, 'I should keep an eye on her too, and Blake while I'm at it, they'll be going through a lot,' Yang mused. Seeing that Blake was still staring at her Yang grinned and said, "Sorry, as to where we're going, I have a few leads if you're interested, from the swamps of Mistral to some big pastoral place a good ways away from Vale, I tricked a few locations out of my dad before he left so there's as good a place to start a hunt as any so I'll punch-em into the computer once we're done in Vale."

Blake merely nodded and returned to driving the ship, shrugging internally Yang decided there was no time like the present and slowly reached out to grasp the other girls shoulder, smiling at Blake she said, "Thank you for this Blake, you have no idea what it means to us."
Blinking wildly for a moment the dark haired girl quickly nodded and mumbled, "Don't worry about it, its nothing."

"If you say so," Yang sing sanged as she rose to her feet and flicked open her Scroll. "Just to be clear, you're fine with me sending the recording to Ozpin right?"

"Yes, if... if he lives up to his reputation he'll be the best person to send it to. Well that or uploading it to the wireless," Blake said with a shrug.

"That'll be the back up plan then," Yang said. She flicked open her Scroll and after a few moments of fiddling with holographic pictures and over sensitive buttons she'd called up Ozpin's contact information and attached the recording to it and marked the message as 'Urgent'. Yang puckered her lips as she debated straight up calling the man or just leaving the text blank before she decided that, if nothing else, that would be kind of rude. So, fingers flying over the screen and Vale approaching in the distance Yang typed:

(Hey Headmaster Ozpin!

Sorry that Ruby didn't make it today, something, well a lot of things came up and for the time being she's decided to go in a different direction, though that doesn't mean you've seen the last of her, or us :) 

You said to contact you if anything important came up and that you could be very understanding, so I'm sure you understand why I'm entrusting this recording to you, please remember a good woman's future may depend on how well you handle this so please take that responsibility seriously.

That should be all for now but if I run across anything in the wilds you need to hear about I'll probably contact you again.

Have a great year at Beacon, it can't be easy with that Deputy Headmistress of yours looking over your shoulder XD

Best regards,

Yang Xiao Long.

PS: You may want to send someone by the attached coordinates as well, just to make sure three particularly juicy bounties don't scarper.)

Yang smashed the send button and the instant the little mail icon grew wing and flew away she flicked over to her contacts list and found Juniors number, this time she hit the call button and was pleased to hear the gruff man's voice within the first two rings, "What is it Xiao-Long?"

"Haha, Junior! Charming as ever I hear, good to know you're still alive," Yang said cheerfully.

"Yeah I'm a regular sweetheart what do you want we're getting ready to open for tonight and I have a lot of cranky employees to deal with, any chance I will be getting that finders fee?"

"Better, how would you like the half the bounties for White Fang Commander Rex and two of her lieutenants?" Yang said, pressing herself up against the wall further from Blake and trying to keep her voice low enough that the engine would drown it out. The other girl knew Yang was handing her former comrades over for a reward but that was different from wanting to hear them being discussed like profits.
"What the? What did you do today?" Junior asked, the faint sound of glass tinkling as he presumably dropped whatever he was doing to focus on talking with her exclusively.

"Lots of stuff, though suffice to say you were more on point about some things than usual, anyway I'd like to think you know better than to screw me out of money-"

"No question, especially if you've added someone like that to your name," Junior answered briskly.

Yang mulled over telling Junior it was Ruby but she doubted the information broker had forgiven her sister for getting his men locked up and decided to let the misunderstanding stand for a time. Changing tracks Yang said, "Good, I'll be dropping them off on you're roof in about fifteen minutes and someone should be there to pick them up not long after, I want them left alive Junior," Yang ground out.

"I know how Bounty Missions work Xiao-Long, now why the roof?"

"New ride," Yang said simply, "Now there's something I need to talk to you about, I'm fine with splitting the take with you on this but I'm gonna be out of town for awhile and I need you to look after my storage locker and most importantly Bumblebee, I'm willing to pay you for the trouble as well."

"Are you now? Heh, maybe you are learning Xiao-Long, what's the catch?"

Folding her free arm over the over Yang smirked and said, "Nothing big, but if you wouldn't telling me if there's any jobs, legal jobs, you could connect me too while I'm out in the wilds, I'll give you a standard finders fee."

"I don't know, caring for that bike of your, and the storage locker plus finding missions, my times valuable you know," Junior said smugly.

"Yeah I'm sure it'll take you forever to skim the mission boards and make a Scroll-call, look Junior I need you for this because my access to Vale's gonna be stretched thin for awhile but it won't be gone, you're making this easier on me and getting some pocket money as well for pretty damn minor work," Yang retorted in a clipped tone.

"Fine, fine, I can find you a few things to do in most places but don't complain if your scruples make it hard, regardless I'll take my cut from you're account.

"I will be keeping books on this Junior," Yang warned.

Junior scoffed, "Please, I haven't lived this long by messing with the count, you'll get paid fairly, it'll be a shame not to have you around if Roman comes knocking but it seems he's got bigger things to worry about than me for now anyway."

"Oh?" Yang wondered.

"Big mess down at the warehouse district, your fault I assume, one of his hideaways got uncovered thanks to all the police in the area, he got away from Goodwitch but I get the distinct impression he's going to be a bit too distracted to focus on anything like coming back on me for the moment so he'll probably let things lie." Junior did not sound particularly joyful about this fact, which made sense, even if the man could be a brute who disliked many of his employees they were still part of his gang after all.

"Well its nice to hear you'll be able to serve me another Strawberry Sunrise when I get back," Yang said, she ignored his muttered 'if' and, seeing Blake wave, decided to wrap it up. "All right
Junior we got a deal, take care of my precious while I'm gone, I'll know if you didn't and be ready for drop off in about ten minutes.

"I'm waiting with bated breath, and be careful out there, I don't have may connections in the wilds but I've heard nothing good lately."

"Grim tidings huh?" Yang said, waggling her eyebrows and ignoring the chorus of groans from throughout the ship and over the Scroll.

"Gods you're awful," Junior muttered, clicking his tongue, "if that's all I'll have the twins waiting to pick up the package all right?"

"Sure, oh and tell me them be ready to catch," Yang said cheerfully before slamming the Scroll shut. She glanced at Weiss who had slid down on the wall and was leaning on a Dust crate, "You all right there Weiss?"

"Fine, just... tired," She said through half lidded eyes, she was looking at the small pile of White Fang soldiers who were breathing softly but not stirring in their bonds.

"You're message get through OK?" Yang asked as she scanned the ship and found Ruby and Zwei in the co-pilot seat next to a twitch eared Blake.

"It should have done," She said simply.

Sensing the girl didn't want her to push further Yang smiled and motioned at the White Fang soldiers, "So ready to drop these three?"

"Yes, it'll be a relief not to have to keep wondering if they'll wake up or not," Weiss sighed.

"Well get ready," Blake cut in, "I'm pulling up at this "bar" now and we can drop the junior Fang off on another roof top a few blocks away."

Weiss began to a quick series of sharp hand gestures before swinging her sword at the floor of the airship, a small clack glyph popping into existence where the blade pointed and slowly spreading out across the surface as Yang picked up the two lieutenants and their muscle-bound boss.

"Think you can keep everything we need on-board Weiss?" Ruby asked, popping her head out of the cabin with Zwei sitting in her cloaks hood cheerfully yapping.

"Hmph! Can I?" Weiss asked with a single sharp arched eyebrow.

"Well can you?" Three voices asked in unison.

"Of course I can!"

"Lets hope so because I'm tilting," Blake said, there was a strange humming noise in the ship as the lever was cranked to one side and Yang experienced a particularly fun type of vertigo as their ship swung on its side, as the hatch doors opened and she got a first hand look at the Malachite Twins faces as they tried to stop the massive blasts of air messing up their hair as Yang looked down upon them in blatant defiance of gravities laws, smirking.

"Hey catch!" She yelled, loosening her hold and casually dropping three unconscious White Fangs on the gawking girls who just managed to recover in time enough to catch the lieutenants, only to be thrown off balance by the surprise size of their commander sending the girls stumbling into one another and to the ground. She saw the two girls, most likely, cursing her name as the ship spun
around and they rocketed off into the distance leaving the twins to deal with another powerful jet engine blast to the face.

It wasn't even five minutes before they soared over a particularly high apartment building and Blake shouted, "Is she ready!!"

'She' being the slowly awakening White Fang grunt who's face was covered in dog slobber and who's jacket had already been hurled out the window. "Uhuuh... My head, Commander, waaaaaahhhh!?" The girls started to scream as the she full awoke to see three Huntresses and the dog that had put her out in the first place having around.

"Sorry about this!" Ruby cried as Yang shot forward, slipped her hand into the girls dark collar as Weiss's Glyph spread across the floor again and they strafed right past the apartments roof; over the howling winds Yang could hear the girl cursing and screaming for her commander while her weak fists smacked against Yang's frame. With a light and speedy dragging motion Yang pulled the girl from the vessel just as they reached the middle of the roof and watched as the girl hit the surface rolling before falling other hands and knees looking up at them the escaping Bullhead with wide eyes. "Try not to do anything else bad!" Ruby called from the ship as the hatch closed, the engines surged and they exploded off into the night, leaving behind one very confused Faunus and a particular confounded apartment building wondering why an airship had just swung by in the middle of the evening.

With Blake flying the Bullhead at top speed, they made it out of Vale proper in almost no time flat. Ruby was resting on the chin on the top of Blake's chair and relishing in the view of the Forever Fall at night, the blistering and intense red forest taking on an almost calming presence under the silvery moon light when an idea occurred to her. "Hey hey guys, do you think the Bullhead Yang crashed still has some working parts?"

"I prefer to think I reunited some metal with the Earth from whence it came but uh, no idea, why?" Yang asked from the back of the ship as she rummaged through their supplied and munched on beef jerky.

Rubbing the back of her head and glancing at Weiss who was half way to dozing off in the co-pilots seat with Zwei in her lap Ruby said, "Well I kinda destroyed this Bullhead's mini-gun and thought if yours-"

"Mine," Blake said blandly, a tiny smirk on her lips.

"Blake's we might be able to juice up our own Bullhead, really make this kitty purr..." Yang's giant smirk was all the warning Ruby needed for the colour to start evacuating her face. as she turned to Blake and said, "Oh gods, I'm sorry I didn't-"

"Its fine," Blake said, rolling her eyes, "and Yang, stop snickering or I'll turn this thing around."

"Sorry boss!" Yang called back.

"I think its worth checking out, if nothing else some supplies might have survived, maybe it will have something other than water and jerky," Weiss huffed.

"I wouldn't count on it," Blake said, "Most of the evacuation ships will only have as none perishable foods as possible, some dried fruits, meat and lots of water."

"Blech," Ruby spat.

"I found some milk powder!" Yang called which didn't incite disgust in her younger sister at least.
"Still, its worth looking into I think, are you on board Yang?" Blake asked as she turned the ship back to where their battle had taken place.

"Sure, I could always use a mini-gun, and if there's any engine parts left I'll have spares if this baby ever has problems," Yang said, her whispered, "proud of you" to a blushing Ruby, followed by a quiet cackle that was missed by no one.

That was when Yang began forcing bottles of water into every girls hand, or in Blake's case, her lap as she did not particularly want to let go off the controls while in mid-flight. The blonde was grinning like a Cheshire cat and not just because Ruby had brought a smile to Blake's face if on accident, but also because a series of texts had come through. The first being from Ozpin thanking her for the tip, congratulating her on a job well done while assuring her that Ruby would always be welcome at Beacon and that Miss Goodwitch was a wonderful and valued member of his staff who definitely wasn't standing behind him as he wrote her back. The next text had been Yang receiving word of a particularly large amount of money being placed in her account and the third, the third was one she just had to show, "Hey guys, news time!" She bellowed, racking up the volume as Lisa Lavender's no nonsense but smooth voice filled the cockpit.

"Update on the White Fang situation in Vale tonight as startling new information has been brought to light regarding the case of accused White Fang member Blake Belladonna. Just this evening two high ranking White Fang soldiers and their notorious Commander 'Rex' all long time members of the terrorist organisation were given over to police custody by Headmaster Ozpin and Deputy Headmistress Glynda Goodwitch. Beacon's headmaster claims their capture and the revelation of a White Fang base in Vale was uncovered by a group of young Huntresses who wish to remain anonymous. He also gave an audio file over to police and the good people at our very news station that has thrown suspicion on the apparent guilt of one Blake Belladonna."

Everyone in the Bullhead tensed, hanging off the reporters every word.

"The recording, gleamed from an exchange over the radio between a White Fang member and an individual posing as a member of the organisation, revealed that the various pieces of evidence of crimes attributed to Miss Belladonna were concocted by the White Fang themselves, intent on using her as a scapegoat after she saved a civilian filled train from a bombing by the White Fang. This new information has also brought to light many inconstancies in Atlas's and the SDC's case regarding the young Faunus and leading certain figures and institutions to suggest that she may not only have been innocent but an agent who was being cast aside for political convenience. While Atlas denies these claim and insists there is still hard evidence connecting Blake Belladonna with the White Fang, the bounty on the Faunus has since been muted. Despite this her presence is still desired by the police for questioning and cross referencing. In other news-

Yang's finger slid over the mute button as Weiss said, "Not exactly what we hoped for but-

"More than I ever expected... Thank you, all of you," Blake said, her eyes soft and her tone wistful as a small smile had edged its way onto her face that spoke of not something so mere as relief but a sudden freedom from a soul crushing weight and a new sense of freedom and lightness. "So, first to that ship Yang crashed?" She asked with something like a chuckle edging into her voice as she freed one hand from the controls and raised her bottle into the air and said, "Then off to somewhere more peaceful."

"That's preferably well away from Vale," Weiss added, raising her bottle and tapping it against Blake's

Yang raised her bottle and tapped it against the other girls, and said, "Yep, across the world with new friends to find what we're all looking for."
Zwei let out a sudden bark, standing on his hind legs and looking about excitedly, ears twitching.

Ruby’s bottle was last to join theirs but her toast no less enthusiastic as she said, "All right guys, let’s make this the most awesome heroes journey ever!" They all cheered and took deep, grateful gulps of water down, Ruby sculled hers first and pumped her first towards the window and said, "Let’s see what's over the horizon."

Chapter End Notes

Well this story has been a ride and a half, I can only hope those who took the time to read it enjoyed reading this as much as I did writing it... Well preferably more given what writers block can be like ;) Anyway that's the epilogue for 'The Knights Errant', as always feedback is both welcome and really appreciated. I'd like to thank Person With Many Aliases once again as this story would never even have had half the content it has now and perhaps never would have even been finished if not for their helpful advice and support. This ending, and the inclusion of Rex, were not things I had originally considered but I feel they make the story and any potential sequels vastly more interesting as well as making more sense, plus I can always get the group nap-collapse scene in another way XD

As things stand this is the end for the Knights Errant, with the newly minted 'RWBY' flying off into the wilds to see what they might find but that doesn't mean I'm necessarily done with this AU yet. As it stands I am considering writing a few small excerpts of life at Beacon with JNPR, it may just be one post time-skipping about to show how things have changed and stayed the same and beyond that I do have a comedic little snippet in mind with the gang looking for Tai and Qrow in a particular tavern and Yang explaining how Qrow and Tai could add up to one functionally responsible adult together (This is meant in a joking manner I don't think Tai's a bad parent or Qrow irresponsibly drunk around the kids but the scene amuses me a lot.

Beyond that I have a sequel in mind as well, tentatively called 'Rogues in the House' which mostly sums up RWBY's relationship to Cinder and Ozpin's carefully managed shadow war, however I may want to focus on RWBY doing mission in the wilds for a bit, and generally travelling around and maybe meeting other teams and people so any return to Vale might take place in a... whatever the word for a move that comes after sequel is should I get that far.

As is probably very clear while I have a lot of ideas for a sequel they are fairly vague and varied both in settings, the Wilds, Mountain Glenn, Vale, and interactions with characters and plot. I have no less that four, no five different 'meet JNPR & CFVY' scenes in mind all of which can spiral off in several different directions after that again. One of which actually just involves running past them on a street at night leaving the teams very confused until they hear loud stomping and then suddenly 'mech'. There's also stuff like Ruby meeting Penny and Yang being awesome, Weiss and potential Winter interaction, plus a cool idea suggested by Person With Many Aliases where Blake has to work at Juniors as a Bouncer/waiter and just generally a lot of things.

I would also like to know more about Cinder's plan, the Maidens, Qrow, Tai, phase 2 and about Merlot Industries and the RWBY games plot as that feels like to good of a
resource not to use at some point. So with that in mind while I will be making plans and am very open to suggestions, I will likely be holding back from any sort of larger story based sequel for awhile until I have a better grasp of the overall RWBY plot to use as a guideline.

Anyway, sorry for the massive notes and once again, I hope you all enjoyed The Knights Errant, thanks for reading!
"Ruuuuun!" Jaune cried as his partner, Pyrrha, and two other students they'd met riding a dying Ursa shot through the bush and stone filled Emerald Forest.

Striking their ears from behind were growing clacking noises and deep demonic hisses, followed by the loud smashing of two giant pincers clamping together at their backs.

To say that Jaune's plans for the Beacon initiation-test-thing hadn't gone as he'd expected would be inaccurate. Largely because he hadn't had a plan, after all, what school tests people after they'd been accepted? At worst the blonde had expected some sort of class ranking test with a bit of sparring maybe; he could have handled that, or so he told himself.

What Jaune hadn't expected was to be catapulted off a mountain into a forest teaming with Grim and filled with ruins. 'And everyone else was just OK with it!' He thought. The clacking sound grew louder and Jaune yelped as he felt the hard skeletal pincers brush against his denim jeans.

"Jaune!" Pyrrha cried, the redhead half spun around, gold armour shining, short red skirt distracting and her gold-red javelin at the ready. It was unnecessary however for as it turned out mortal terror could reach heights Jaune had not imagined before, which forced him to speed up once again despite the fact his lungs were heaving, his white chest plate was smacking against him and that he was sweating buckets in his hoodie.

"To the ruins!" He cried as a broken down grey stone tower came into view through the tree-line. It almost seemed to hover in this air between a wide gorge the other side of which was a hill back up to where they'd been launched from. Bursting from the forest and darting passed crumbling stone beams Jaune felt a sense of relief run through him as his feet touched the stone bridge, 'Now all we need to do is get over the... cracked, unstable, and really, really old bridge... Hahahaa...' Sometimes Jaune really hated his luck. The squeak of rubber shoes dragging on stone as he ran somehow seemed almost louder than the raging scorpion monster behind them, each clack of the stone or slight rumble sending a tremor through Jaune's frame as they shot across the bridge and towards safety.

Casting a glance behind him Jaune saw how thin the bridge was and let himself slow, stumbling forward towards the big... tower, thing, he leaned against the cool stone, heaving and panting in relief. Slapping his back against the ruin Jaune turned to look at his fellow Beacon students. There was a tiny looking orange-haired girl with a massive shark like grin on her face. She wore a pink skirt connected to a white shirt with a heart-shaped hole in the centre the chest and was holding a giant silver rocket launcher. Next to her was a guy with dark hair partially tied back into a small ponytail who looked as exhausted as Jaune felt, though he wasn't panting as much. He carried two green mini-machine guns and wore simple grey pants and a slightly fancy looking green shirt with gold patterns on the sleeve. Pyrrha didn't even seem winded, her red pony tail swung back and forth like a tail as she eyed the massive scorpion monster. The beast clicked its claws and let out a low frustrated screech as its mandibles skittered across the ground, digging up chunks of earth as it wavered from side to side, glaring at them with six glowing red eyes.

"Its too big to follow us here, we can... relax..." Jaune gasped, sucking in a breath.
"I suppose," Pyrrha relented, slowly diverting her attention from the scorpion to Jaune. Under her emerald eyes gaze Jaune tried to hold himself a little higher, he'd already been saved by her way too many times, he couldn't go looking weak now!

"Nya nya nya!" Said the hammer girl, blowing a raspberry at the Grim while pulling down an eyelid.

"Nora!" Cried the boy with weary tone of someone who was had seen such behaviour before and knew they were going to see it again in maybe five minutes. Jaune was quite familiar with the tone, growing up with seven siblings and all.

"Sorry Ren!" Answered the gir- Nora, in a high pitched and chipper cheer before she began skipping towards him.

"So uh, guess we should go hand this in...?" Jaune said, holding up the golden rook, his words trailing out as he saw Pyrrha's eyes shoot wide open before the girl spun around clutching her spear. 'Oh no,' Jaune thought numbly jaw dropping and ears burning, his hands shook as he tried to grasp Crocea Mors and he began sliding back.

The Deathstalker, that was what Pyrrha had called it, was moving, the massive yellow-ish bone covered scorpion so old moss had grown on its body was skittering along the bridge, its long speedy legs flickering as it dashed towards them.

Something was blurring towards him leaving orange trails of light through the air. 'The stinger!' Jaune thought, instinctively throwing his shield up in front of him, but it was coming in on top and-

"Clang!"

The sound of rock hard bone striking against steel rang out and Jaune saw Pyrrha standing before him, shield held high and protecting his head. Pyrrha's normally serene features were a mask of frustration, her lips thinned and teeth grit as the stinger lurched back and forth atop her shield, smashing against it in an attempt to break through her guard.

Something flashed from the corners of his eyes and towards Pyrrha, Jaune kneeled at her side shield up and let out an, "Ah!" As a massive pincers slammed into his shield. The force of it force him to skid back across the ground until he and Pyrrha were touching as they struggled with their burdens.

"Nora I can't hold it alone!" Ren ground out from behind them.

"I've got it Ren!" Nora answered and Jaune could only assume the two partners were now holding back their own pincers. Though judging by how the Deathstalker's right arm seemed to be straining as it leaned itself forward they looked to be having better luck than him.

Jaune could hear the stones cracking around them and the pressure began to steadily increase as the Deathstalker slowly scraped forward. "We-! We need to blow out the bottom of the bridge!" He cried, desperately hoping the only one with the rocket launcher would listen.

"Ren!"

"Go I have this!"

Nora slapped one hand on the rough pincer, left hand flying to her back as she grasped her beloved Magnhild and she flung herself over the Deathstalker's limb.
"Hrr!" She heard Ren grunt as the Deathstalker tried to swing at her only to be caught by her friends grasp.

'He doesn't have much Aura left!' Nora thought. Slinging Magnild into her arms she took aim at the bridges crumbling base and squeezed the trigger just as the Grim started... pulling back?

Ren sagged with relief as the Deathstalker drew back, crunching in on itself like... "Its going to jump!"

The Grim slid back on its spindly legs, crouched down and just as Nora's rockets blew out the bridges support it launched itself into the air. A mighty, almost slobbery "Schree!" leaving its pincer-covered mouth. It hadn't jumped well though, going high but falling almost head first towards him? Ren staggered back towards the tower for cover and watched as the Grim's pincers lashed out and its stinger shot down towards, "Nora!"

Before Ren could act the blonde cried, "Pyrrha!"

"Yes!" And the girls bronze shield blurred through the air letting off a strange hum as it tore through the Deathstakers stinger.

"Schree!"

Not far from him Ren heard Nora let loose a roar mixed with one of her trademark cackles as she aimed her weapon and shouted, "Smile hahaha!" And suddenly a wave of pink missiles were unleashed upon the airborne Deathstalker exploding with giant pink puffs of Dust-smoke, pummelling its back and sending it hurtling from the tower and screeching down into the chasm below.

Nora leaned over the edge of the balcony one hand cupped around her ear and she smirked at the muted boom that hit their ears.

Pyrrha held her arm up and sent out a rippling energy wave with her Semblance. Her Aura flowed threw her flying shield and the metal thrummed as it responded to her beckoning call and hurtled back through the air and slipped onto her wristband in a flash.

Behind her Jaune was leaning on the wall having smiled and swaggered when she offered to help the exhausted boy stand only to lean on the cold stone in an attempt at a cool casual pose. Pyrrha personally thought it looks both cute and dashing.

Seeing their impromptu allies strolling over to them Pyrrha smiled and said, "Maybe we should return the relic now?"

"That sounds like a good plan," Answered the dark haired boy in a slightly rough but calm voice.

His partner however had strolled right by her and Jaune and was staring at the mountain behind them, finger on her chin. Finally she hummed and said, "Hmm, don't you guys feel like something missing here?"

"I'm, not sure what you mean," Pyrrha said slowly, glancing subtly at the boy, Ren, to see if he knew what she was thinking but the pink eyed warrior seemed just as lost as Pyrrha while Jaune was looking on in similar confusion.

"I'm, not sure what you mean," Pyrrha said slowly, glancing subtly at the boy, Ren, to see if he knew what she was thinking but the pink eyed warrior seemed just as lost as Pyrrha while Jaune was looking on in similar confusion.

Nora threw out her arms and waved them as she said, "I don't know, like that mountain feels like its missing a decapitated Nevermore or something! I mean even our win felt kinda dull, all that build up and we drop it down a hole!" She cried, stomping her foot in disappointment and sending
"I know right!" Jaune cried, pushing himself up and only wobbling a little as he spoke animatedly. "I mean imagine if we'd cut the stinger off before it jumped and you-"

"Smashed it with my hammer!" Nora shouted, grinning in terrifyingly rampant excitement.

"That would have been so cool!" Jaune enthused, clutching his fists and cheering into the sky.

Pyrrha looked to Ren again and saw the boy seemed both worried and resigned to the discussion which to Pyrrha felt like it was slowly spiralling out of control.

Coughing into her hand she said, "Well, while I am sure that would have been brilliant it seems we didn't have the time and the plan we had worked very well. Thank you Jaune, Nora, and Ren, for doing so much."

"You kinda did a lot too Pyrrha," Jaune said, first enthusiastically but he seemed to sag a little as he spoke.

"I loved the part where you cut off the stinger!" Nora chimed in.

"We all played our part, but now maybe we should go return our relics," Ren said with the subtle instance of a parent trying to herd their energetic child.

"Yes, this place looks perfect to be dive bombed by a Nevermore and I don't think any of us are in a fit state to decapitate one," Pyrrha said.

Gulping Jaune cast his gaze around the sky, now ignoring Nora's look of predatory excitement as he said, "Yeah we should go. Like, now," He said, pointing to the mountains behind them with his thumb.

"Aw out-voted," Nora sighed, slumping forward with her arms going limp.

"Don't worry Nora, I'm sure we'll get to fight a Nevermore some other time, once we've rested," Ren said calmly as they all began walking towards the only remaining bridge.

"I guess, still, it makes ya think doesn't it?" Nora said as she stared at the mountain.

"Think about what?"

"What could have been," She said, giggling at her friends perplexed expression as she booped him on the nose and then jogged forward to take the lead.

Later that evening the quartet found they would be seeing a lot more of each other as they were dubbed team JNPR, under their leader, Jaune Arc.

And thus, their time as Beacon students, truly began.

Chapter End Notes

So this is the first of a three part 'JNPR Arc' mostly just covering how things start and proceed for them at Beacon Academy with the butterflies of RWBY not being present.
I hope everyone felt in character and received both a realistic and balanced role in this piece. As always constructive criticisms and questions are most welcome, thanks for reading!
After a fairly auspicious entrance to Beacon academy, no other students had defeated a Grim the size that JNPR had, Jaune had just sort of expected everything to fall into place. Maybe not perfectly, maybe not instantly, but he'd proven himself an ideal hero, right? He hadn't been turned away, he hadn't failed and best of all he wasn't dead. So naturally he was a bit disappointed when the universe decided to be a jerk and slammed a mace into his stomach.

"Urk!" Jaune gasped and gagged as he was slammed in the gut, air evacuating his lungs. Jaune felt himself being dragged off his feet by his attacker, the wind whistled by his ears as the world blurred, and then the pressure on his chest vanished and he was sent hurtling through the air.

"Uaaah!" Jaune cried as he was thrown into the darkness, the dim lighting of Beacon's arena and is silver armoured opponent blurring as he flew. His flight came to an abrupt halt as his armoured back slapped against the wall with a clank and he dropped like a stone. Slamming against the floor Jaune panted and propped himself up on his sword, looking over the gathered students towards Cardin Winchester back in the brightly lit arena.

The brunette sent him an ugly smirk as he rested his oversized black mace on his shoulder pauldron. Behind him a massive blue hologram showed Jaune's Aura at twenty percent, 'Not that it makes much difference, stupid ring outs.' Jaune thought, as he ignored Cardin's own 'ninety five' percent rating.

"Match over by ring out," Cut in Glynda Goodwitch's coldly professional voice. It reminded Jaune of a doctor who'd entirely stopped caring about bed-side manner and who was only doing the bare minimum to sound professional.

The lecture theatres lights flared and Jaune cast his gaze around the massive hall. Before him sat the stage that Cardin was swaggering off from, beneath his feet were massive metal squares and off to his right was the state of the art lecture hall seating. He hadn't known 'state of the art lecture hall' had been a thing, but the massive desks that curved to surround the oval shaped hall to grant a better view of the sparring arena were also equipped tiny forcefields and holo-computers.

Not that anyone was using them as everyone was gathered around the ring and he could hear the occasional chuckle and vague gesture in his direction as Pyrrha came to try and help him up. He shook her off, lightly, and sighed as he folded his shield back into its sheath form and slipped his sword away.

"Students that will be all for today, I expect all of you to continue training in your own time to give a better showing in our next sparring rounds. Now then, off to your next period," Professor Goodwitch said promptly before marching off the stage as students filed out, the din of conversation growing louder and louder as she moved further away.

'Another fun day at Beacon,' Jaune thought as he led his team towards the cafeteria. Somehow he really didn't feel hungry today.
Academy. So far she was finding the reality of her Beacon experience to be both exactly what she'd hoped and somewhat... underwhelming.

Pyrrha had hoped that she would be able to escape the shadow cast upon her by the reputation she'd gained as the 'Invincible Girl'. That title and repute of a perfect untouchable warrior who was to be admired or challenged instead of seen as a peer or fellow youth. In that respect, Beacon was turning out to be everything she hoped for. Mere chance had led Jaune to stumble into her and the blonde had proven quite unaware of her fame until the day after they'd met. She'd been concerned upon him seeing her face on the Pumkin Pete's cereal box but he mostly seemed energised by how 'cool' that was rather than intimidated by what had gotten her placed there.

Similarly her team mates were remarkably nonplussed by her fame and reputation. Ren seemed to observe her with a certain contemplative gaze but the quiet boy seemed to do the same for everyone he encountered. While Nora was... Nora. Pyrrha had no words for the girl but she definitely liked her.

Similarly the teachers so far hadn't offered her preferential treatment, the most she'd received was acknowledgement for a high level of performance in class which while Pyrrha felt was unnecessary even with her humility she had to acknowledge was earned.

Pyrrha looked at Jaune's downtrodden form. The blonde sat next to her at the silver cafeteria tables and was swirling scrambled eggs into a fine paste with his fork. Ren and Nora were engaged in a debate about pancakes and Beowolves but were watching her and Jaune from the corners of their eyes.

Casting her gaze out across the wide lunch halls of Beacon, packed to the brim with feasting students Pyrrha eyed Cardin Winchesters bulky frame at the table behind them. She scowled as the boy forcefully and repeatedly slammed his side into a much smaller Faunus girl sitting at the same table with him despite how she clearly wanted him and his partner, the spiky green haired Russel, to stop.

'The rest of Beacon's students aren't exactly living up to expectation,' Purrrha thought harshly. 'Huntsmen and Huntress should comport themselves with mercy and honour but Cardin and his band of thugs show none of that, and Jaune's the one who gets laughed at? Disgraceful!' She thought.

Slowly, and a little awkwardly Pyrrha leaned closer to Jaune and said, "We can't keep letting Cardin get away with his behaviour."

Jaune lurched up and in a cracking voice said, "Huh, what? Nah..." Jaune said shaking his head. "What are you talking about Pyrrha? What "Behaviour"? Cardin's just messing around, you know, he's just kind of rough."

"He's a bully and a thug," Pyrrha insisted, reaching for Jaune's shoulder only to have him pull away, however slightly.

"Yeah, he totally knocked those books out of your hands and was all strut ting away like "I'm the queen of this hive."

"I'm the queen of this hive."

"He does seem to have a grudge against you Jaune, remember how he got you shield stuck in the door?" Ren asked.
"Oh come on this stupid thing plays up all the time," Jaune retorted, his voice rising in pitch as he seemingly looked around for escape routes.

"And his behaviour when sparring with you is so blatantly malicious," Pyrrha said, trying to push past Jaune's evasiveness. She imagined why he might be acting as he was, Jaune had precious few friends at Beacon besides his team. While Nora and Ren seemed content with one another's company but willing to welcome Jaune and Pyrrha and Pyrrha... Well she had grown used to a certain amount of isolation and preferred it to rivalries or fawning. Jaune however clearly thought a great deal about what others felt about him and so far his performance was not living up to his own standards let alone his peers or Beacons and no matter how he tried to shrug it off it was clearly getting to him.

"Cardin's just got a rough sense of humour guys, sure he can be a jerk but its not just to me," Jaune rambled.

"He is a jerk," Nora said simply, in fact she sounded oddly calm compared to what Pyrrha was used to hearing from her. Then the redhead shot to her feet and grinned, "I know, lets break his legs! And every other part of him! Then we'll slam his broken body up against the front of Beacon so everyone can see the results of messing with team JNPR!"

"Maybe dial it back a bit Nora," Ren said.

Nora dropped down into her seat and went back to eating whole pancakes in single bites. "OK Ren, but we really should do something, mm, you know these aren't as good as yours."

"Thank you."

Pyrrha and Jaune slowly turned their gazes from their team-mates, back to one another and Pyrrha said, "Jaune, what Nora is trying to say is that we're here for you-"

Jaune practically jumped from his seat and gathered up his half eaten lunch as he put on a terribly forced smile and said, "Guys, really, its nothing I can't handle. I got this." Then he immediately spun around and tried to rush away only to let out a yelp, accompanied by a similarly high pitched cry as metal trays and glass plates clattered to the ground.

Pyrrha shout around to look at her partner and saw him awkwardly standing in front of the now nearly sobbing rabbit Faunus Cardin had been teasing. Cardin was hovering over them grinning as he slammed his armoured hands down on their shoulders.

"You know, animals are meant to eat off the ground and I don't think any human could be as weak as Jauney-boy here, maybe he's a worm Faunus!" Cardin bellowed. His table and distressingly several other students in the cafeteria let out sharp, barking laughter.

Pyrrha did not notice her knife warping and twisting in her hands as she glared daggers at Cardin while he started shoving Jaune and the girl down, though apparently the Faunus wasn't quite as weak as her diminutive frame suggested because he seemed to be struggling.

As Jaune's knees began to buckle Pyrrha's temper snapped, slamming her hand down against the table with a crash she snapped, "That is far more than enough Cardin Winchester!" Rising to her feet Pyrrha marched over to the momentarily stunned brunette and dragged his hand from Jaune's shoulder.

Slapping her away Cardin sneered and said, "Hey guys look-it, the prim, proper and perfect Pyrrha's come to save her charity case."
"I'm not a charity case!" Jaune seethed.

Cardin ignored him however, glaring down at Pyrrha he continued, "Or did you come to adopt the rabbit here? I can tell you the ears are real, what, Jauney-boy not scratching whatever itch you picked him up for, like that's a surprise.

"How dare you," Pyrrha hissed, sucking in a breath and just wishing they were in an arena. "How dare you call yourself a Huntsmen Cardin."

"Me? Why the crap should Beacon, the "Best Academy on Remnant"," He said in finger quotes, "Have to accept losers who can barely hold a sword and freaking animals, don't get angry with me because I'm the only one real enough to call people on it."

"We all have to put up with an incompetent beast like you Cardin," Pyrrha retorted. From off to the side one of CDRL shouted "Boo!" And tossed an apple at her head. Pyrrha slapped it away and towards Cardin who caught it with practised ease, and then Nora gasped so loudly everyone within ten feet heard her.

"That's one step too far! No one throws food at our team mates!" She shouted.

Before Pyrrha even knew what was happening she heard JNPR's cafeteria table screech as it was dragged across the floor and then before she could even turn her head Nora had launched the table at CDRL.

"Aaah!"

"Duck and cov-!

The table slammed into theirs and sent the rest of CDRL, their food and table sprawling across the floor before landing atop their collapsed forms.

"Rhaa!" Cardin roared, blurring down he grasped the long cafeteria seat he'd been tormenting the Faunus girl on earlier and swung it down towards Pyrrha's head.

Pyrrha easily ducked to the side and sent a mocking look at the boy. Sliding away from her Cardin drew his arm back and launched the seat at her like a missile. Pyrrha threw herself back and somersaulted out of harms way while the table embedded itself in one of the white pillars behind her. She landed next to Ren and Nora who were both scowling at Cardin as Jaune and the rabbit Faunus looked like stunned deer.

"CDRL!" Cardin roared, grasping the apple in front of his eyes as he glared at Pyrrha. With a loud clatter the boys team flung the table off of themselves and as he crushed the apple in his hand Cardin barked his one and only order, "Crush-em!"

The quiet and resigned "Oh no," was missed by all as the Beacon lunch halls descended into chaos.

Coco, Fox and Yatsuhashi were marching down the hallway after a particularly gruelling session with Professor Peach when Fox's head twitched up like he was listening to something. As the boy froze both his team-mates did as well, turning to the scarred brunette as he said, "The Mess hall seems to have been consumed by a screaming cacophony of chaos."
Coco resisted the urge to say 'What?' or even better to dismiss it as a joke but after more than a year of working together all of CFVY had learnt that when Fox said something, even if it was odd or seemingly irrelevant, it was best to listen. Otherwise he'd just wait silently, looking at no one with his white eyes until 'it' happened and whoever had disagreed was proven wronger than they ever wanted to be.

Thus the C, F, and Y of team coffee, waited, Coco and Yatsuhashi turning to look at the Beacon's Mess Hall building. They were just in time to see the tiled roof explode as a flailing and screaming armoured brunette was launched through it, followed by half a dozen windows blowing out.

"Isn't that where," Yatsuhashi started in his smooth timber.

"Velvet is," Coco finished.

Without another word the three students leapt from the third story window and charged towards the Mess Hall halfway across the campus. However they were too late, because when they arrived everything looked perfect, orderly and neat, while Velvet was nowhere to be seen and only a few dozen students ambled about looking nervous or cranky.

"Professor Goodwitch," Fox said simply.

"We should go ask her what happened," Yatsuhashi said.

Coco hummed and grabbed the first student who walked by her on the arm and said, "Hey, so, mind catching us up on what happened here?"

The dark haired first year simply muttered, "All that stupid rabbit girls fault for making such a fuss."

As it turned out that was a really stupid thing to say.

It was a little known fact that Beacon Academy did not in fact have any form of Janitorial employees. Students were expected to manage their own bedrooms, teachers their lecture halls and robots handled the hallways and cafeteria, usually. For anything beyond their ken there was Professor Goodwitch. So often in fact was the blonde be-speckled professor forced to clean up some damaged building or horrendous mess made by a student, or on their lesser days her colleagues, that she sometimes wondered how Beacon had ever survived without her.

An arrogant thought perhaps but Glynda could not recall any other professors in Beacon's relatively short history that could do what she had just done. It took only the wave of a riding crop to return what would have been well over a thousand Lien worth of property damage to a perfectly undamaged cafeteria. In the next instant she had re-ordered every table, chair and wiped away the horrendous splattered mess that had caked the floor, walls and roof. All while rounding up and containing the inadvertent ring leaders of the chaos who now stood at attention in her classroom as she marched back and forth in-front of them.

Teams JNPR, CDRL and Velvet Scarlatina of CFVY all waited silently as she eye balled them harshly. JNPR looked nervous and shamefaced while CDRL looked on with barely restrained annoyance and Velvet stood between the two groups head and ears drooping as she stared at the floor.

"I hope you understand how deeply disappointed in all of you I am," Glynda started. "Even as young as you are students at this prestigious academy are expected to comport themselves with restraint, honour and rigour, traits none of you displayed today. You are simply lucky that
Headmaster Ozpin in a meeting with the councillors or else he would be in charge of your punishments."

Glynda heard three familiar sets of footsteps marching up to her door and let her speech hang there as Coco Adel swung open her lecture hall doors. She was followed by the always quiet Fox and Velvet's giant of a partner Yatsuhashi. Glynda turned and stared at the trio, granting them permission to speak with a simple nod.

"Professor Goodwitch I know what happened in the cafeteria was a mess but all the students we interrogated," Coco started, a choice of words that did not seem to do Velvet's mood any favours. "Said that Velvet was being bullied and that she didn't even start it, how come she's here as well?"

"It does seem unfair professor," Yatsuhashi uttered, as his team cast their worried gazes towards Velvet who looked very much like she wanted to fade from existence as she scrunched up her food stained skirt.

"While I am sure Miss Scarletina appreciates your concern she still played a role in escalating affairs and participated in the proceedings," Glynda answered coolly.

Coco scowled and seemed to barely bite back the urge too spit at Glynda's feet as she said,"That's unfa-."

Glynda swiped her riding crop through the air to silence the girl and said, "What you deem fair is irrelevant miss Adel, now restrain yourself for the rest of this meeting and remember its only your place as her team that permits you all to be here." Coco and her teams scowled unhappily but remained quiet.

Order restored, Glynda marched to the centre of the bronze duelling platform and surveyed the nine students. "All of you will have two weeks detention after school and be assigned extra homework. A report on how Huntsmen and Huntresses should carry themselves seems appropriate. Your teams," She stressed, "will not be working together as you have not proven to me that you are mature enough to do so. Now then return to your classes, I will send you your assigned tasks once classes are over and if you do not attend to your tasks promptly your punishment will only grow. And remember, if you do have problems with one another bring it to your instructors rather than attempting to resolve it amongst yourselves. Dismissed."

Glynda was not remotely surprised when JNPR and CDRL opted to leave through opposing doors, brushing past each other and scowling. While Velvet found Coco and Fox's arms wrapped around her shoulders and Yatsuhashi at her back as she was escorted from the lecture hall. Glynda did not try to tune out the angry muttering of team CFVY or the hiccuping and choking sounds Velvet made as she tried and failed to stop herself from crying.

Crushing her riding crop in her grasp Glynda turned to the entrance at her left that CDRL had slipped through and just as expected found Ozpin watching her. The grey haired headmaster rested one hand on his cane and was sipping a, likely, cold mug of coffee as he looked at her blankly. Ozpin had never been expressive but Glynda liked to think she could read his moods somewhat and right now frustration and disappointment seemed to almost radiate from his frame as he walked over to her and joined her on the stage.

"That was perhaps a little harsh given Miss Scarletina did almost nothing from what I understand," He said simply. There was no reproach in his voice, he likely already understood but wanted Glynda to say it out loud.

Sighing Glnda said, "I am aware of that Headmaster but the students were already muttering about
JNPR and Velvet once I quelled the chaos and citing them as responsible for trying to incite a 'Beast war' right in the cafeteria. "I am sure she will, and I imagine you will attempt to be there for her as well, next time something is to happen," Ozpin said vaguely.

Turning her eyes from the headmasters Glynda shrugged, almost feeling like a student again as she answered, "Perhaps. Now Miss Nikos, what are your thoughts on her involvement, is she still as you imagined?"

That, at least, threw Ozpin for the slightest of loops and he returned to talking to her in a more casual than expectant tone. "I did not expect this exactly, but the desire to end conflict is an admirable one. I believe we should observe her throughout this detention to see how she responds."

"Agreed, Professor Peach has wanted more samples from the Forever Fall, I believe it would be a good practice for JNPR," Glynda said.

"Very well then, I will let you return to your classes."

And with that Ozpin was gone, more students were filing in and Glynda prepared to deliver the lecture.

The day after the 'Faunus Food Fight' as some, CDRL and others like them, were calling it and JNPR found themselves in the cafeteria once again. This time however there was a noticeable amount of space between them and the large percentage of students.

All of them were aware of it and it was doing no favours to Jaune and Nora's moods as they cast worried glances towards the rest of the hall.

Which of course meant they were all shocked when four sets of footsteps seemingly popped into existence behind them. "Hmm, so it was you guys right?" Said a smooth feminine voice.

"Huh? Us?" Jaune asked as they spun around and found themselves starting at a team of four. The seeming leader of the group was a slim brunette with her chestnuts hair brushed to one side, black sunglasses and a beret atop her head. Next to her was the brown haired rabbit Faunus from yesterday who was blushing. Next to her was a boy with several small scars on his face, white eyes and washed out orange hair. Behind them all was a veritable giant of a man, cropped black hair and firm features, but a surprisingly soft smile.

"Yeah you guys tried to help Velvet yesterday," Answered the sunglasses wearing girl again.

"Thank you," Said Velvet softly, she had a strange accent Pyrrha couldn't place but she was glad to
see the Faunus looking more upbeat after the previous day

"Oh I remember you, you were the hand bag lady from yesterday!" Nora cheered, previous bad mood seemingly forgotten.

"Coco Adel," The girl chuckled, "leader of team CFVY, we switched up our class schedules a bit to sit with Velvet and it seems your guys table has plenty of space. Cool if we sit here?"

"Oh sure, we've got space, space for days," Jaune said waving lazily around the table.

"Space for days?" Coco said cheekily.

Jaune smiled a little and said. "Space for days."

"Good I hate eating in crowds, down we go guys," And that was how team CFVY became a regular part of the JNPR lunch room experience.

Chapter End Notes

This is the second off the planned three instalments of the JNPR side story. I tired to show how Jaune and really all of JNPR's support network is much smaller at first than in canon due to the absence of RWBY which hopefully worked as a butterfly to justify the other changes. Similarly I hope Glynda's explanation for punishing Velvet makes sense as I was basing the idea of research and stories I've heard about real life situations, hopefully it worked.

This chapter was also to hopefully establish a bond between JNPR and CFVY that should I get to writing an AU for season 2 will hopefully carry over there and offer JNPR some extra people to hang out with.

Also editing scenes with Pyrrha in, wow, that tanked my mood for a bit there.
The Forever Fall Forest was not a place Jaune would have imagined a detention taking place, yet here he was. The deep red leaves rustled in the charcoal black trees as their fallen kin scrunched under Jaune's feet, all the same shade as the crimson grass. A small stack of glass jars sat off to the blonde's side as he used his sword to make another cut on one of the thicker trees and held the jar below as sap slowly oozed into its new home.

Rolling his shoulders Jaune let out another of what had been several groans as he stared at the white crate he'd brought his jars out in. 'Thirty empty jars in the box, thirty empty jars...' He sing-songed in his head, eyeing the seven he'd managed to fill so far with a grimace. 'It feels like I've been here forever...' He thought despondently.

Around him the Forever Fall remained as silent as it had since Professor Goodwitch had dropped them off. The combat instructor had sent each member of JNPR off in a separate direction so they couldn't help one another and told them to watch out for Grim before leaving them to it. Suffice to say Jaune wasn't enjoying her hands off approach any more than he enjoyed her lecturing him on the finer points of fighting.

As his jar slowly filled itself the young Huntsmen in training couldn't help but ruminate on the unfairness of the situation. 'It's not like I started the food fight, and Cardin's the one being a jerk, if everyone just left it alone I could have dealt with it,' He thought. Glancing around the crimson forest Jaune tried to guess where Pyrrha was, he knew which direction she went off in but...

'Chances are she's already done and now looking to help her charity case,' He thought dismally. Jaune tried not to let it show, a guy couldn't act weak like that, but Cardin's insult bothered him. The fact so many students simply passed over him when he went up to spar or was asked a question bothered him. The fact that not only the teachers but his own team seemed to know he couldn't handle things bothered him. 'I'm meant to be a hero, not some damsel, I don't need anyone's help!' If they all just left it alone and stopped trying to baby him Jaune knew he'd catch up, he just had to!

In the quiet of the forest Jaune heard a twig snap and the faint padding foot falls of someone approaching from behind. Turning his head Jaune said, 'Pyrrha I'm fine, I don't need a- Ursa!' Jaune fell to his side just in time for the towering black furred Grim's meaty paw to swipe through where his head had been, tearing the tree apart and sending it crashing to the ground.

"Rrra Raaaaa!" It seethed as Jaune skidded away from the spiky beast. He wasn't fast enough though as it back-pawed him across the face and sent him rolling across the ground. The Ursa charged at him again, its speedy trundle almost looking comedic if he weren't staring in horror at the creature reared back for another swing. On instinct Jaune lashed out with his sword and sliced the Grim across the belly. 'Yes!'

The cut was shallow thought and the Ursa's attack didn't stop. As its massive paw hurtled towards him Jaune grabbed his shield and flicked the switch, the metal sheets slid out as he brought it up to his side but only got halfway before the Ursa's paw slammed into his frame sending shock-waves through his body. Jaune was sent flying once again, bouncing a along the ground, ears ringing and vision blurring as he crashed up against a tree with a nasty crack!
Jaune's fingers tore through the grass as he pushed himself up and looked at his...opponents? 'OK, two Ursa, I got this. Once they stop spinning I got thi-

The ringing in Jaune's ears did not deafen him enough that he missed the crack of gun-fire nearby and in an instant a spear exploded through the back of both Ursa's heads and the fuzzy duo faded back into one just in time for Jaune to see its limp body hit the ground with a thump before scattering like ash and leaving no sign it was ever there.

"Jaune are you all right?!" Called Pyrrha frantically as she ran to his side, summoning her spear back into her hand as she passed by the sight of her latest victory.

"Py- Pyrrha I'm fine," He said, trying to slip out of her grasp as she pulled him to his feet and began inspecting his battered body. "You know I had that in hand right?"

She stared at him wide eyed and clearly disbelievingly before showing one of her soft smiles as she nodded and said, "Of course, sorry for stealing your moment."

Waving his hand dismissively Jaune said, "Don't worry about it, I'll save you next time OK?"

"I look forward to it," Pyrrha said chuckling a little and Jaune hated that he wasn't sure if she was laughing at the joke or him coming to save her. Jaune was pulled from his reverie when Pyrrha patted him on the shoulder and said, "Jaune, I need to get back to my area of the forest, call if you need anything and... Could you meet me on the dorms roof tonight?"

The first year dorms of Beacon were tall, grand and very... boxy, building Coco had always thought. All built like mansions the grey and orange stone buildings were neatly spaced out with tidy white paths and gardens. But tonight, she and Fox weren't there as exterior decorators, though Coco did have more than a few suggestions in mind should someone have asked. No, they were partners on a mission, the brunette smirked as she fondled a fist sized metal ball in the palm of her hands, thumb running over the blue button.

"Yatsuhashi, can you confirm targets presence?" Fox asked into his Scroll. She and Fox were keeping low, ducking beneath the ground level windows and hiding behind shrubbery when necessary as they shot across Beacon's campus as the broken moon shone its silvery light down upon them.

"Confirmed, all targets present, accounted for and in place. They don't suspect a thing," Answered the warrior.

"Good work Yatsuhashi, now get out of there and let us take it from here," Coco whispered as she and Fox pressed themselves up against the corner of the first year dorms.

"Done, good luck you two," Said Yatsuhashi before Fox's Scroll line went dead.

Just as Coco was about to dart around the corner and launch her 'surprise' right into CDRL's open window she felt Fox's hand come down on her shoulder. "One's at the window," He whispered roughly.

Coco edged one eye around the corner and there he was, Cardin Winchester. The leader of team CDRL's back was against the open windows edge as he rested one leg up and looked out across Beacon Academy with that same smarmy smugness Coco had come to expect from him.
"Of all the nights he decided to sit out there and contemplate his navel he has to pick this one?" She hissed, ducking back around the corner.

"Is the mission still a go?" Fox whispered.

Coco shrugged and said, "Yeah I don't see why not, its not like we were planning on getting away with this anyway. It won't be as much fun if they know its coming but it'll still be worth a laugh and hopefully teach them some manners." And if they got detention, well Coco, Fox and Yatsuhashi didn't care, even if they weren't assigned with Velvet it still meant team CFVY were being punished together and had shown one did not mess with their team.

"I forgot to ask, but when did you have time to make a paint bomb like this?" Fox asked.

"Hm? Oh in shop, I had some spare time after maintenance and no one was watching the spare parts bin so I helped myself. Also its paint-grenade Fox, I'm not messing with these jerks I'm making a statement," Coco said.

"Fair enough," Fox said, sniffing the air, "You added some spices too."

"Nothing too evil," Coco retorted.

"I wasn't criticizing," Fox added and she could tell by her partners tone he was grinning a little. "Though perhaps give it a minute?"

"Why?"

"Some people, Jaune and Pyrrha, are talking on the roof, its not going well but I think it would be best if we didn't interrupt," Fox answered.

"What are they talking about, their 'not relationship'?" Coco asked.

"Pyrrha's offering to train him and Jaune is... not fond of the idea. Oh my, it seems he snuck into Beacon with false-transcripts," Fox said. He didn't sound particularly shocked, but then Coco rarely heard her partner inflect and she was a little to busy squeezing her grenade in a death-grip to care.

"How is he even alive if he pulled that?" Coco hissed. 'Turning down training, from a champion, his partner after sneaking in, what the crap!? Does he want to die!?'

"He says he doesn't want to be the damsel in distress he wants to be the hero," something snapped under Coco's very expensive boots. "He's sick of being the one stuck in a tree while his friends fight for their lives. He wants to do it alone and... Now he's told Pyrrha to leave him alone... I think I hear Cardin moving about."

"That little, does he even get what being at Beacon means? What being a leader means? I'll give that blonde an earful," Coco hissed.

"Maybe I should talk to him?"

Coco glanced at Fox who was staring at her completely seriously, his scarred lips forming a simple line. "I think I'm a bit more... communicative than you Fox."

"Maybe, but I can get him to listen," Fox answered.

"Fine, go nuts, but if he ignores you I'm giving him a piece of my mind. I'll chuck this in when it
seems like you're done,' Coco said.

"Don't have all the fun without me," Fox answered and in a single blurred jump he was gone.

Jaune rubbed his arm and tried to banish the disappointed look Pyrrha had sent him from his mind. He was making the right call, he had to be, if he got help he wasn-

"Jaune," Said a scratchy voice.

"Huh!?" Jaune spun around and found Fox of team CFVY to be sitting on the ledge of the roof, arms resting on his knees and his white eyes staring unwaveringly at Jaune's face. "Uh, hey, Fox right? How-ya doing, just taking an evening, um, roof... walk?" Jaune asked uncertainly. 'I have no idea how to talk to this guy,' Jaune thought. "Something like that," He answered quickly. "Coco and I heard your and Pyrrha's talk."

Jaune sucked in a breath and whispered, "Fox, please, please don't tell anyone, I , I can-"

"Relax, we aren't interested in ratting you out," Assured the older Huntsmen, rocking back in his seat. "Coco has more than a few things to say to you but I thought you might be more willing to talk to me."

"Uh, about what?"

"About acknowledging the need for help from others, even at the expense of one's pride," Fox answered without missing a beat.

"Oh, not you too! Fox, I went over this, what's the point in me being here if I can't make it on my own? I'll just be that loser who needs help all the time." Jaune knew he'd set Fox up for a zinger right there but the boy didn't take it and remained silent. Sighing Jaune said, "Look, I appreciate that people want to help me, but I don't wanna be that guy, I wanna be a hero."

"And of course heroes have never needed any assistance from others in the past. The thousands of Huntsmen and Huntresses that worked in teams and fought in wars with their comrades before us were all... What?" Fox asked speculatively.

"That is not what I meant OK? Being in a team and always needing help are too different things. How am I ever going to earn my place here if Pyrrha's helping me along all the way?" Jaune reasoned.

"How are you going to do so without help? We have classes for a reason, teams and fellow students to work with, its hardly unusual for us to help one another or train together," Fox retorted.

"But it wouldn't be training together, she'd be training me! I don't have anything to give yet so its just charity!" He seethed. Fox remained nonplussed, completely expressionless like a marble statue with scars. Waving his hands Jaune groaned and said, "Oh why would I expect you to get it, you're from team CFVY, one of the best combat teams in Beacon, I kidna doubt you've ever had trouble with anything here."

"Jaune, you do remember I'm blind don't you?" Fox asked, the faintest quirking of his face as if he found needing to remind someone of that fact amusing.

Waving his hands, only to realize how pointless that was, Jaune said, "No, no, sorry I, uh, its just you never... Like, it never seems to get in the way..."
"You'd be surprised," Fox answered quietly. "Jaune I've trained long and hard to get where I am today and I have every intention of going further still. Yes, I am what many would consider strong, but even from my first day, even now I still have to rely on my team because there are certain things I simply 'can't' do..."

Fox let his sentence hang there for a second and Jaune felt his chest tightening as his mind went to war. He was torn between one side acknowledging the older boy's words and the other half convinced he still wasn't being understood, that he was still being talked down to.

"It can be, vexing at times..." Fox said carefully, almost like the words themselves were fragile and hard to process. Jaune's eyebrows shot up at that and he stared silently as he waited for Fox to continue. Clasping his hands Fox said, "It can be incredibly frustrating, even down-right embarrassing when I need to ask for help. Even now when they know what to do off by heart some part of me can sometimes rankle under this disability and the road blocks it puts in my way. But I would never doubt that my team respect me as their equal. I would never not welcome their assistance because not only are they my team but they're my friends and there is nothing we wouldn't do for one another."

Sighing Fox continued, "Perhaps this won't make sense but... Jaune, you said you wanted to be a hero, but you aren't strong enough, not yet, you could be though, but here's what you need to understand," Fox said, his voice growing rough. "This is not about you," He said bluntly.

Before Jaune could even think of speaking Fox pushed on, rising to his feet and sweeping his hand passed Jaune. "Its not just about you, its not about me, its not about your partner or any one team, let alone pride or our dreams Jaune. Its about the people out there," He said, pointing to Vale. "Out in the field your team will rely on you and you on them, the same is true for anyone else you work with and even more from people we are supposed to protect. Every last soul down there sleeps peacefully because Hunters spend their lives battling the Creatures of Grim and in that war we have to use every resource available and we have to be able to rely on one another, protect one another."

He spun around and began slowly walking back from whence he came and said, "Jaune, if you're willing to let your dreams and your pride keep you from taking any and every opportunity that comes your way to help you serve your team and protect the people... You will never become half the hero you want to be."

Jaune felt his shoulders sag and his head droop causing him to miss Fox's exit. Slowly Jaune turned and stared, first at the giant silver towers of Beacon with their luminescent emerald lights. 'This is where I came to achieve my dream... to become a hero...' Slowly Jaune spun around and looked over Vale, hands balling into fists as Fox's words resounded in his mind. 'No one soul is an island unto them self.' The words flashed through Jaune's mind, something that spilled from Professor Oobleck's mouth during a lecture that only just registered now.

"What sort of hero... do I want to be?" Jaune asked himself. Turning his gaze to the floor he thought about how Pyrrha had come to his aid in the forest when she had no reason or motive to. He thought about the stories he'd heard a hundred times over of hectic battles and selfless sacrifice and bravery. Finally he said, "Well, a good one I guess... and probably also an honest one," He added. Resolve steeling Jaune looked up and marched down the stairs to his dorm room, so frantic was his pace and so loud were his strides and heartbeat he totally missed what happened the moment his shoe hit the stair well.

"I think I helped," Fox said idly.
"Good thing you did or I'd have been twisting his ear off by now. All right lets get this show on the road," Coco uttered and the duo proceeded to shoot out from their cover. Sliding across the pavement outside CDRL's now closed window Coco dropped the grenade into Fox's hand.

He looked at her surprised and he heard the girl click her tongue as she said, "I made it, you throw it, sounds fair." She then stepped forward and Fox drew his arm back, thumb pressing down on the button as Coco shouted, "Hey jerks, we got something for ya!"

Fox threw his arms forward, the outline of Beacon's dorm rooms solidified in his mind through touch and presence in his Aura. He heard the first instantaneous crack of the window before it exploded from the force and the surprised screeches of four voices shrieking.

"Oh yeah, ten points ya filthy trash!" Coco shouted as the grenade ticked once and then exploded with a boom, followed by the violent sound of something like water slapping against walls and skin alike.

"Aaaah!"

"Oh gods the smell!"

"My hair!"

"Its in my eyes, why is it in my god-damn eyes!?"

"We should go," Fox muttered.

"Sure," Coco said, chuckling as they ran. "Velvet's gonna be tiiiiicked."

"I'm sure we'll hear all about it during detention," Fox said.

"Never looked forward to that so much in my life."

"... And that's about it," Jaune said, hands nervously tapping against his sides as he watched his silent team mates. Nora was half dangling off her own red quilted bed, Ren was leaning against the window and Pyrrha was seated at her desk just a little further away from everyone else. They were all deadly silent.

It was only for a second but it seemed to drag on for eternity and Jaune needed to fill the void, which may have led to some repetition. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have lied to you guys and Pyrrha... I'm sorry for how I acted... I won't hold it against you if you guys want to take this to Ozpin or tell me to leave."

"You already know how I feel Jaune, I haven't changed my mind in the ten minutes since we talked," Pyrrha said. She sent him one of her kind, almost matronly smiles and shed a tinkling little chuckle. But then her face grew sombre and her eyes fell upon Nora and Ren. Nora was looking at the floor, cheeks puffing out while Ren had simply folded his arms and kept his gaze firmly on the same bit of carpet as Nora.

"Ren, Nora, I-" Pyrrha started, but Jaune held up his hand and shook his head, eyes begging for silence. 'If they make their decision, I want to know it was theirs,' Jaune thought, nothing else would assuage his troubled mind.

Nora hummed, slapped her hands against the floor and front flipped from her bed to the floor. In an
instant she was bare centimetres from Jaune's face, her wide, electric eyes staring into his own. Her head tilted, weaved and wobbled, Jaune tried to match her movement while silently gulping down his nervousness. 'What does this mean!?' He silent screamed.

"OK!" Nora cheered, and like that she sprung back from him, hands behind her back and a cheery smile on her face as Nora threw herself onto her bed and began bouncing.

"OK?... That's it?" Jaune asked, practically gaping as his hands grasped futility for the train of logic his, apparently still team mate's mind followed.

"OK means OK, silly! I mean yeah you told a lie to get in here but you also helped us with the Deathstalker, if you'r a bit behind oh well you just need to run for a bit and catch up! Heck, I'm doing bad in history! Can you believe that!?!"

"Heh, I think that's because you were doodling on Professor Oobleck's assignment Nora," Ren said.

"Nah," Nora said, "Doctor Oobleck said he really liked my passion and energy, it was just my accuracy that was the problem. Ah well..."

Jaune wanted to laugh and lose himself in the easy camaraderie of his team but he still needed one more answer. Turning to Ren, Jaune said, "So..."

"So what?" Ren said, pushing off from the wall the pink eyed boy strolled passed Jaune, only slowing to clap him on the shoulder as he passed. "Nora's right, you practically led us through that Deathstalker battle and so long as you want to improve and work at it there's no reason you shouldn't be here. I'm happy to have you as our leader, Jaune."

Sniffing Jaune ran the black sleeves of his uniform across his eyes and said, "You guys!"

"Team Group hug!" Nora commanded.

All things considered Jaune's night had gone extremely well. Pyrrha had been ecstatic that he wanted to take her up on the tutoring offer and Ren had even suggested making it a team thing. It had been odd when Nora cut that suggestion down to only a few nights a week but Jaune guessed she had plans for herself and Ren on those nights. Pyrrha had seemed a little red faced during that part of the discussion though, Jaune hoped she wasn't coming down with anything.

JNPR's mood only improved when they found out "someone" had apparently pranked team CDRL. The re-pungent smell of the boys and their room was an easy thing to shrug off when they still clearly had blue paint on their faces and were none too happy about it. Even better, Jaune knew he was overdue for Cardin messing with him again yet hadn't scene hide nor hair of the boy all morning. But of course, no good thing lasts forever and the end of the good times was signalled by Professor Goodwitch marching up to them at lunch, her be-speckled gaze falling disapprovingly on Jaune.

"Mr, Arc, you and your team are requested in Headmaster Ozpin's office to discuss your... enrolment," She said harshly. Nora and Velvet gasped while everyone else at the table fell silent as they stared up at their teacher.

"Professor, I assure you-" Pyrrha started.

"Miss Nikos, your input is not requested here, this is an order," Professor Goodwitch said.
"Hey can we come too? Beacon solidarity and all that?" Coco cut in.

"No, this is a matter for JNPR's ears alone," Professor Goodwitch clarified.

"Hmmm, you said everyone in the food fight was lucky the headmaster was busy right?" Coco asked, not even waiting for an answer she continued, motioning to Fox and Yatsuhashi as she said, "The three of us are the one's that trashed CDRL's room."

"You did!?" Velvet screeched.

"And Velvet had nothing to do with it," Coco clarified.

Rolling her eyes Professor Goodwitch merely beckoned them along with a sharp gesture and the two teams followed her silently on the long march to Beacon's central tower.

They arrived just in time to hear the silver elevator 'ding!' only for Cardin, a streak of blue paint on his face, marching out of the elevator with a nasty grin on his face the moment he laid eyes on Jaune. "Hope you enjoyed your last night here," Cardin said.

"Mr Winchester, return to your class at once," Professor Goodwithc ordered with a single sharp wave of her riding crop.

"Yes ma'am," He muttered as he slipped his hands into his dark pants and tried to muscle his way passed Yatsuhashi only to be brushed aside as the taller boy walked forward to join everyone else in the elevator.

Cardin's minuscule embarrassment though was completely overshadowed by the cold sweat that had broken out on Jaune's entire frame. He could feel his ribs shuddering and lungs straining to suck in air as Pyrrha's hand rubbed circles on his shoulder. 'It's over, Cardin heard, he heard, I'm so screwed!' Jaune thought as he stared at the elevator buttons, idly wishing he could just press them all to slow the descent to his inevitable doom.

"Jaune, I'm sure it will be fine, we'll explain to Headmaster Ozpin, we'll reason with him," Pyrrha said. Her tone however was nervous and shakier than Jaune had ever heard it outside of the Deathstalker fight.

"Yeah and if that doesn't work we can bribe him," Nora whispered, "I think I know his weakness."

On the other side of the elevator CFVY were having their own dialogue.

"To be fair Coco," Fox whispered, "They were being very loud."

"I didn't hear them," She hissed back.

"Well your gun is really loud," Velvet offered, ears twitching a little as she spoke.

"I am not, going deaf," Coco said bluntly, just as the elevator dinged to announce their presence. "What was that?"

"There will be no more tomfoolery in the Headmasters presence, all of you. You will not speak unless spoken to. Am I understood?" Professor Goodwitch said, looking over her should to give them all a dose of her icy stare.

"Yes professor," They all murmured with little enthusiasm.

Slowly JNPR followed Professor Goodwitch and CFVY into the headmasters office, the older team
looking almost at home in the grand place. All around them giant clock gears spun, on the ceiling, under see-through emerald flooring, even the silver haired Headmasters desk and chair looked to be made up of gears. the faint clunking and ticking noises creating an eerie sense of unreality.

Headmaster Ozpin sat in a tall curved chair that vaguely looked like the spine of some alien creature. Somehow Jaune was reminded of the Deathstalker's tail. He was in his usual green high neck shirt and black jacket, fingers steeted as he surveyed the group from over his tiny spectacles as steam wafted off his coffee mug.

"Good morning everyone," He said. The man's voice was smoother than last Jaune remembered it almost jovial even but just a little too empty for true humour. "I am sorry to call you away from lunch but a student brought to my attention something he felt I should address sooner rather than later. But first, Team CFVY, how can I help you?"

"Well kicking Cardin into the depths of the Emerald Forest would be a start," Coco offered.

"Miss Adel," Professor Goodwitch hissed before stepping forward. "Miss Adel, as well as Fox and Yatsuhashi admitted to being the one's who 'pranked' team CDRL's room last night."

"I see, a serious matter to confess to, but I am pleased you were honest enough to come forward," He answered, smiling a little at the team. "I believe a weeks detention is sufficient enough, you can help Velvet with her project."

"Yes sir," Yatsuhashi answered solemnly. Fox merely nodded and Coco gave a cheery little salute and said, "We'll tell you all about it during our next debriefing sir."

"I look forward to it." He answered, nodding at CFVY's leader. "Now then, Mr Arc, leader of team JNPR and first year at Beacon Academy after having helped retrieve a relic in the Emerald Forest and aided his future team mates in defeating a Deathstalker. Is all of that accurate?"

"Uh, yes?" Jaune said, gulping a little, and tilting his head in confusion, Did he dare hope?

"Well then, while there are appears to have been some, shall we say confusion, regarding the information placed on your transcripts which I am sure can be corrected, you did technically pass the initiation to enter Beacon," Headmaster Ozpin said simply. "Yes! Yes! Best Headmaster ever!" Jaune thought, grinning at the older man.

"However," Ozpin said, not harshly but with the sort of weight and presence one only gets through seniority and position.

"Why is there always a however!?" Jaune thought. "You did enter Beacon under false pretences and were assigned a team because of that. Given the necessity for trust and ability to assist one another in teams I have decided that the decision should be placed in their hands, rather than my own. So then, Nora, Ren, Pyrrha, do you wish for Mr Arc to stay on as your leader? Be removed from Beacon, or perhaps placed in a remedial position?"

"We want him to stay!" Pyrrha said forcefully, before clapping her hand over her mouth and gasping silently. "I apologize, Headmaster but Jaune already plans on training his combat skills with us."

"And he told us all of this last night and we assured him we still welcomed him as our leader and team mate," Ren finished.
"And we'll fight anyone who says otherwise!" Nora added, punching the air excitedly as she hopped around like a boxer.

"Marvellous, and the fact you are seeking out aid from your team is very reassuring," Ozpin said. "With that out of the way and your physical education in good hands there is still the matter of these forged transcripts," The headmaster said, sounding bemused and almost playful. "I'm sure you can imagine the annoyances of paperwork such as this so I thought you might be willing to attend a few after school classes with Professor Oobleck to brush up on a few subjects and to maybe assist him with the filing. He's been quite insistent on helping with the budget this year and I feel he could use an extra set of hands."

A few weeks of helping one of the nicer teachers shuffle paper with some studying as punishment for lying his way into Beacon? Jaune was more than happy to accept that trade! "Yes sir, I'll be the best assistant he ever had!"

"That's good to hear, well then, I don't want to keep any of you longer than necessary and each and everyone one of you has busy days ahead of you. Professor Goodwitch if you would be so kind as to ensure they make it to class without any detours?"

"Of course headmaster, come along children," Tutted the blonde professor, leading them along like they were a procession.

"So uh what's your detention, project thing Velvet, you've been kind of vague about it," Coco asked.

"Oh, well I'm doing some extra work on weapons and that sort of thing as part of a larger project Professor Goodwitch is overseeing," She said, surprisingly cheerfully. Her team looked at the professor who did not turn around or acknowledge her presence in the discussion. "But my detention is actually in the library."

"Now that," Fox said, "is funny."

The much more jovial teams soon exited the elevator only to find Cardin leaning up against a nearby wall whistling and tapping his leather shoes against it.

"Mr Winchester," Professor Goodwitch said, scowling, "Do not place your feet on the walls." She snapped, and with the slash of her hand the boys foot was dragged from its place and slapped against the floor.

"Right, sorry professor, just thought I'd say bye to Jauney... boy?" He trailed off as he looked at the happy teams and in particular smiling Jaune, Grimacing he ground out, "What happened?"

"Headmaster asked his team whether they wanted him to stay, they said, yes, given he passed initiation that should have been enough really," Coco said. Cardin gaped and looked ready to spit, growling he stepped forward only for Coco to speak again. "Say how'd you boys like my handiwork? I can always show you other examples of my engineering skill," She said, clicking her tongue.

"That was you!?" Cardin roared. "I stink like rotten eggs and chilli you twit! Please tell me they have to clean up the mess they made of our room!" He bellowed at Professor Goodwitch as he thrust an accusing finger in CFVY’s direction.

Sliding her spectacles up to the bridge of her nose Professor Goodwitch hummed. "It would only be Coco, Yatsuhashi and Fox given their decision to exclude Miss Scarletina from their pranking
habits. However I can see the worth in such a chore, though I imagine they would need a certain amount of... autonomy."

"Uh.. autonomy?" Cardin asked wearily, suddenly looking much less pleased by the idea of CFVY cleaning his dorm room.

Coco rubbed her gloved hands while Fox and Yatsuhashi cracked their knuckles and necks respectively and said, "Oh yeah it'd be a big job, I put a lot of work into that baby you see, no telling what we might need to chuck in the garbage. But hey, how about we make some adjustments to your guys living space, just to show there's no hard feelings," She said, grinning like a shark that had found its pray to be particularly slow and meaty. "I mean, there's just so many little machines and additions one can make to a room without anyone being the wiser, but I'm sure they'd improve the ambience," Coco chuckled.

"You know what, we sort of have our own thing going on there, an order to the stuff, wouldn't want you guys messing that up," Cardin said, slowly walking backwards and shaking his head.

"Perhaps you should all attend your classes now?" Professor Goodwitch cut in.

"Yes ma'am!" They all said in unison.

"Excellent, and don't forget, all of you have detention this evening."

The following yes ma'am was a little less enthusiastic but each student quickly filed out with Professor Goodwitch following behind them, presumably in case of any shenanigans. But really, Jaune just wanted to soak in the sun a little and bask in the lack of weight on his shoulders, he knew what came next might be gruelling but at-least he could face it head on now, with his team at his side.

'My first year at Beacon is really looking up,' He thought happily.

Chapter End Notes

So this is the end of the JNPR side story, hopefully it showed how JNPR got along in this changed world. As it stands I only have a few scenes and notes for future RWBY centric side stories but I would very much like to write them how long that takes is uncertain though so hopefully this side story has been fun.

I confess this was a tricky story as a lot of it involved balancing Jaune's positive traits with his early canon flaws and trying to reach a resolution slightly different from the original series,hopefully that worked and all the characters were well represented.

As always comments questions and critiques are welcome, thanks for reading!
Scavenging Knights

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The broken moon of Remnant shone its dim silvery light down upon the Forever Fall Forest adding to its haunting atmosphere. Night animals and relentless Grimm ambled through the crimson forest in search of a meal or victims.

In a battered and burnt out hillside four figures worked under the light of the moon and their Scrolls as they picked through the battered wreckage of a Bullhead. Their own much less damaged airship sitting nearby under the protection of a dozing canine.

To say that it had been an eventful day for the quartet would be an understatement. Two had begun their days expecting to attend an illustrious combat Academy, only to end up in a high stakes air-chase and a fight with terrorists. Another had been intent on escaping the law, her former allies and Bounty Hunters only to be spared and to get her name partially cleared. While the final one had simply intended to try and make some quick cash and found herself now travelling with what was left of her family and two nominal strangers into the Grimm infested wilds with a stolen White Fang airship.

Delicate and practised fingers roamed through the minutia of the wreck, blue and feline eyes pulling free Dust Crystals and undamaged supplies from the torn up ship. Elsewhere quick finger worked under the hum of a brunette as she sorted through the weapons and armaments. While the last of the weary travellers lifted torn and whining metal from the wreckage, tossing aside what she saw they couldn't use and inspecting engine parts with scrutinising lavender eyes.

Or at least, that's what she had been been doing.

"Hey Blake!" Yang called as she flicked a charred magazine back and forth in her gloves hands. "Guessing you haven't heard of the "Frisky Faunus" magazine?"

Ruby's "Urg!" of disgust echoed throughout their temporary salvage operation. She quickly ducked around to the other side of the vessel and buried her head into the ships engine via a small hole.

Blake leaned back from the Dust cache she'd been inspecting and looked ready to spit. "I hate that awful drivel, it does nothing but fetishise Faunus as animals and apparently many of the pin ups are actually humans in costumes."

"Ah, so I guess its not standard reading material for the White Fang then?" Yang asked jokingly.

"I can't believe something like that would have ended up here, how repugnant," Blake muttered.

"Just throw it away Yang!" Was Weiss's answer followed by an irate huff as she started scouring the Dust Crystal again. *Its not stealing, these are all from my families company after all,' She told herself.*

"Fine fine just thought it was weird and woah!" Yang shouted, letting out a whistle, "Just look as Mister and Misses Friday!"
"Ew! Yang I do't need to hear this!" Ruby cried.

"I'm just making an observation Ruby, you should expand your interests beyond weapons sometimes," Yang said, smirking all the while.

"There are much better pieces of... literature," Blake said, wrinkling her nose as she said the last word, "To diversify one's life with."

"Eh maybe, but I think one can always appreciate picture books you know?" Yang said.

"No," Weiss snapped, stomping up to the blonde she stabbed the tip of her blade through the magazine and in a tiny flash of red it was reduced to cinders.

"Thank you Weiss," Blake sighed.

"Thank you!" Ruby called, her high pitched voice ringing out with a metallic twang from inside the ship's framework.

"Burning books Weiss!? Where will your evil end!?" Yang gasped.

"Leaving you in the middle of the woods sounds like a good ending. Have you actually done anything useful?" The heiress snapped as she marched back to Blake. "Blake and I have found several stashes of food, water, some milk-."

"That's been ruined," Blake cut in, repressing a grimace.

Weiss waved her delicate fingers and continued, "Along with vast stashes of Dust Crystals and powder."

"Which we have since categorised and stacked in the proper order," Blake finished, her voice rising in a slight imitation of Weiss's own.

"There's nothing wrong with keeping things in good order," the white haired girl huffed. "So what about you Yang? Anything to report besides... reading material?"

The blonde shrugged and rapped her knuckles against the Bullhead's one remaining and slight charred cylindrical jet. "Well unlike the wing we found in the forest-

"The one you blew you off," Blake noted.

Yang shrugged, chuckling she said, "Hehe, you didn't pull over when I ran the sirens. Anyway that one was completely burnt out. The shock waves along with Burn Dust and my Aura created an instability so the propulsion system basically overpowered itself and got charred to nothing."

"Frankly its amazing there was even salvage metal, now this one," She said. "This one is still in good condition. The fuel lines were a little taxed and the frameworks a bit scuffed thanks to trying to keep the whole Bullhead up solo but that's aesthetic at best."

Yang pointed towards the nose of the ship, once buried in the hills side but now liberated by her efforts, with the frame pulled away at strategic spots. "Now Blake, I'm gonna make a guess and say this was, what a scouting craft, or maybe an escape one? Like more than normal I mean."
"I think so," Blake answered slowly, "Bullhead's weren't really my area but it would make sense given its role in the evacuation."

Yang nodded, her blonde hair shining gold for a moment illuminating her grin. "Thought so, this thing really wasn't that armoured compared to a regular one, let alone to ours! Thanks to that need for speed though the fuel lines aren't just well cared for the numbers been increased for extra efficiency. Heck they're actually reinforced a bit beyond the norm as well! Now the Anti-Grav's a bit busted but the source is good, its mostly a few light dings. All things considering we have like... half a functional ship here its mostly just the frame and some of the internal like the computer that got trashed... Well that and the roof," She added looking up where the torn up ships roof should have been only to see the ships walls and some Nevermore talon marks.

Weiss stared speculatively at the blonde for a long moment, face scrunching up as she half glared at the woman as if appraising her. Yang for her part, just looked amused. "Please tell me all of that wasn't nonsensical jargon," Weiss finally said.

"Hey I may not be a genius but I was a top student at Signal and more importantly I know engines," Yang assured her, clacking her sealed Ember Celica bracelets together.

"So we can salvage it, or well, bits of it?" Blake asked, leaving her and Weiss's collection of Dust containers in a neat stack.

"The whole ship? Crap no, the on-board computers trashed and burnt, so are a lot of structural supports," Yang snorted. "But the primary engine, the fuel lines, and a lot of integral, well lets just call-em cogs, those are all good. But If I'm gonna do it now I'd need Blake to help me take it apart just to scavenge those parts. A lot of them need to be taken out all at once so Ruby's help would be nice as well. Even then it might take me, hmm, a few hours at least. I'm basically gonna have to strip this things entire frame off, not a huge loss given how busted up it is but some spare plates and metal sheets wouldn't do s much harm either."

"I can help now if you want- Uha haah," Blake yawned, barely bringing her hands up to her mouth in time to try and hide it.

"Thanks but even with your night vision I'd be working half blind and doing this when we're nearly asleep doesn't strike me as the best idea ever. I say we make camp, get some sleep and maybe pull it apart in the morning."

Weiss smothered another yawn herself, they was contagious, and nodded. "We've got the Dust, weapons and food already so I suppose we can wait for tomorrow and not have to worry about any of it vanishing over night." There was a loud bang from within the Bullhead that rang out like a gong accompanied by short 'hah!' "Ruby, what are you doing!!?" Weiss called.

"Down here guys, Yang lift up the ship!" The younger girl called. The trio jumped over to the other side of the downed ship and saw Ruby's boots sticking out from inside a tiny hole in the ships panelling.

"Ruby!" Yang screamed. In an instant she wrapped her hands around the base of the damaged ship and lifted with a mighty grunt before tipping the hulking mass on its side with a bang!
"Guys, I found the mini gun, and its in perfect working order!" Ruby's squealed from inside the Bullhead, her voice resounding with a metallic echo. The base of the ship whirred to life and a singularly massive mini-gun popped out of a sliding hatch on the base.

"Awesome," Yang uttered, a feral grin on her features.

"That could be useful," Blake mused.

"Eeeeh this is so cool! I have so many ideas!" Ruby squealed her feet kicking wildly from inside the ship.

"You're always like this aren't you?" Weiss asked no one in particular. Sighing she muttered, "Well I suppose it could prove useful."

"So useful!" Ruby chirped from inside the ship. "Just imagine if I turned Crescent Rose, into a customisable high impact gatling-sniper rifle!"

Weiss was picturing it, and she was very scared.

Yang laughed and with a little bound was atop the upturned ships side and squatting over the small hole Ruby's feet were sticking out of. Grasping the younger girls ankle Yang pulled her sister from inside the Bullhead.

Seemingly unperturbed by this Ruby, with grease stains on her cheeks and fingers merely waved, "Hi!"

Waving a free hand back Yang said, "That sounds awesome Ruby and I want to hear all about it tomorrow. But I think right now we need to turn in before we all start passing out and become Grimm-chow."

"What!?" Ruby cried, throwing her arms out wide and smacking them against the ships side. "But I'm no- uuhh... tir- aaah!" She yawned.

"Really?" Yang said with an almost audible rolling of her eyes. Ruby merely huffed, glaring up at her sister with folded arms as she swung back and forth.

"I think we could do a lot more with this if we took some time Ruby, maybe we can come up with some schematics in the morning?" Blake ventured.

"All right!" Ruby huffed, "Yang can you lower me down again? I want to see if the closing mechanism still works to keep it safe tonight.

"Sure thing little sister," Yang answered, leaning over and lowering Ruby back into the ship.

"And Blake, don't let me forget I wanna hear about your weapon later!" Ruby's voice echoed.

"Gambol Shroud?" The Faunus answered, velvet ears twitching.

Weiss stalled for a moment as the meaning of that name flashed through her mind. 'And here I was expecting something like 'Shadow ripper,' The former heiress mused.

"Uha, such a cool name!" Ruby called back as the mini-gun began sliding back into its
"It means to leap around playfully doesn't it?" Weiss asked. Maybe she'd mis-remembered that particular string of words. Or was sleepy, that as possible as well given she couldn't stop blinking.

"Yes that's right," Blake said, fiddling with the weapon uncomfortably.

Yang puled Ruby from the ship and with a gentle twist flipped the smaller girl to her feet and they both dropped down to the ground and rejoined the group. Ruby looked a little flushed from so much time spent upside down though and was leaning against Yang in obvious weariness.

"Cool name, it fits," Yang offered.

"Really?" Blake asked with some mix of genuine surprise and a vaguely sarcastic... Weiss wouldn't call it a purr but it definitely had the right sort of tone for it.

"Sure," Yang shrugged. "I mean it certainly felt like that when you were knocking me around the forest like I owed you money," the blonde said, grinning like a loon as they began marching back to their own airship, Ruby on one side and scavenged weapons in her other arm.

The tiredness seemed to be spreading through every limb now as they got closer and closer to rest. As if it had been pursuing them all day and only now had the chance to dig in its claws and spreads its numbing poison.

"You barely even, uhhaa, budged Yang," Blake offered.

"Doesn't mean it didn't hurt, haha," Yang answered as they began clambering into the ship. "Huh, you know it just occurred to me we don't have any toothbrushes, or clothes, oh well something to trade for I guess and I found some mouth wash at leastsst." The blonde trailed off as a tiny snore hit her ears.

Ruby was half clinging and half slumped on top of Yang from the side, one arm wrapped around Yang's arm, head on her shoulder and arm wrapped limply around her back. Her eyes were closed and her mouth hung open.

Looking to her younger sister Yang smirked and muttered, "All-right you can have tonight off." Yang tried to disentangle her sister but found the, presumably, sleeping girls grip a little too strong to shake off without waking her. Thus the blonde half carried her around the vessel as she flicked out the the brown quilts they'd pulled from storage.

"We should hear it if anything starts rummaging in the wreckage, at least if we leave the doors open a crack," Blake said quietly as she and Weiss sealed off the outside world.

Yang dropped down to the ground and leaned back against one of the Bullhead's grey walls, propping Ruby up against her side. She'd have picked up Zwei as well but the corgi was in the cock-pit and probably wouldn't enjoy a wake up call after such a hectic day.

She was surprised however when Blake dropped down next to her passing off a quilt and pressing herself into a corner barely a foot away from the sisters. Grinning at the brunette Yang whispered, "Looking to keep away the chills?" She flexed her Aura and let loose a small radiant wave of heat around herself.
Blake merely rolled her eyes and muttered, "Wanted to have as many people between me and the
dog as possible in the morning."

"Ah you'll warm up to us soon," Yang said before turning to Weiss who was still fiddling with the
rough brown guilt in the near darkness. Another pulse of Aura flew from Yang's core and into her
hair. Fusing the thousands of strands into a shifting golden mass of light and energy. "Want to join
us over here? Warmest person this side of Vacuo at your service," She whispered.

"I'll be fine, the colds never bothered me anyway," Weiss answered. "Thank you for the extra light
though," She added, finally unfurling her bedspread. Once the girl had wrapped herself up and
folded her jacket beneath her head for a pillow Yang let the light dim, leaving the Bullhead barely
illuminated by the moonlight from the cockpit.

She only had to wait a moment before there was a slight scuffling as Weiss slid herself over and
whispered, "Vytal might be warmer than Atlas but this is still a metal ship.

"Central heating at your service," Yang answered, and warmth spilled out from her frame and filled
the ship with its comforting presence. So much so that Blake didn't even notice when Zwei
trundled in and flopped into Weiss's lap. And soon enough each one nodded off to sleep.

The next morning Yang woke up with three other women lying on-top of her. While a position she
knew many would kill to be in, it was a lot less exciting than it sounded, especially when she was
being used as a heater and really wanted some breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

Notes:
So this little snippet could be considered the cap off to the previous slice of life stuff
done with the JNPR Side Stories, as it stands if/when I publish somehting else will be
a longer more adventure centric story following 'RWBY' as they travel across
Remnant doing random missions, meeting new people from fast talking archaeologist-
Doctors, to other teams, to pirates and lots of Grim.

This was mostly just meant to be a fun little interaction piece, though it was also a
chance for me to play with 'how' scavenging would work and what they'll be doing to
get by between missions. Plus, well, world building is fun :D

In some respects, if very minormally, I'm not just trying to show how their relationships
are and or hint at how they'll be developing but I am also hoping to demonstrate the
sort of roles each of the cast members will take up in the team. Without Beacon to
provide the leadership role to Ruby she's not super likely to take it up all the time,
though she will still be the hardest to rattle, the one with a clear path and crazy-
awesome strategies don't worry about that. Blake will mostly be in charge of sneaky
stuff, information gathering and survival in the wilds. Weiss's area will be Dust and
internal knowledge of negotiations, and cities, while Yang is sort of, well, the team
"mum" so to speak and the tank, she looks out for their physical and emotional well
being and is the liable to be the best at talking them through things or knowing when
to be there for them as we saw with Blake's sleep deprivation arc in canon (Though she
also has some useful knowledge based on her time working for Junior and is of course
a solid engineer thanks to Signal)
Anyway I hope anyone who read this piece enjoyed it, please feel free to comment, critique or ask questions, and thanks for reading!
Weiss was not particularly used to roughing it, so to speak and a few weeks “on the road” had not been particularly pleasant for her. That was despite having an airship and the living heater that was Yang Xiao Long at least making the nights bearable. She was also not used to living in cramped closed quarters with other people constantly getting under foot. Weiss wasn’t sure she’d woken up on the ‘right side’ of the bed in over a week. And despite having some practice she was still not used to fighting around others. A fact she was reminded of when she spun around to dispense with some charging Beowolves and almost blasted Ruby with a wave of fire.

“Sorry!” They both shouted, blurring passed one another on the chaotic forest battlefield.

Nearby Blake and Yang were occupying the armoured rolling Boartusks as the frenzied beasts shot across the field of battle ready to smash whatever they came across. Weiss’s fire stream shot into the air and she heard several wretched caws emanating from a murder of Nevermores circling them up above.

Or at least they had been circling.

The greatest off the Nevermores, easily thrice Weiss’s admittedly diminutive size, reared back and let out a demonic screech. The forest exploded with exploded with tiny Nevermores that spilled into the air at every angle with a thousand fury filled cries as their elder watched from overhead.

Seeing her beloved blade out of Dust Weiss looked to the others and quickly joined them in falling back to back as more Grim spilled out of the forest. ‘And to think I wanted an actual mission!’ Weiss thought to herself, teeth gritted as she and her fellows braced for the oncoming wall of dark feathers and rage.

The quartet of would be Huntresses had spent the last week neck deep Grim infested woods. Yang and Ruby had dismantled the crashed Bullhead’s engine and scavenged all they could over the first two days. Two days Weiss had spent being tutored on the finer points on hunting and scroung-scavenging for food in the wilderness by Blake who refused Zwei’s company on their trips. Weiss had studied survival of course but she’d always planned on being… better prepared.

And in truth even that wouldn’t have been enough, one could write about how sweat and grime built up to a general feeling of uncleanness. Or could explain the back and neck pains that came from using a metal floor or muscle bound blonde for a pillow. They could even go into great detail about the realities of hunting, skinning and gutting something to eat from a camp fire.

One could explain all these things all they wanted but that didn’t make the reality of it any less unpleasant or simply more ‘real’ to Weiss. She couldn’t keep her Aura up twenty for seven either so her dress and body were beginning to pick up tiny tears, dirt and were starting to smell bad. Some camaraderie could have come from the other suffering similar indignities but her companions seemed immune to irritation. Only Ruby seemed even close to bothered and then only because she was protective of her cape and dress. However their tough make and her own skill in the forests made her worries nearly moot.
None of this was helped by Weiss feeling more than a little useless. Once all the Dust was found and organised she truly couldn’t offer much that anyone else couldn’t do better save acting as the rear-guard while the others worked and hunted.

Blake had been surprisingly informative on the topic having spent several year of her life out in the wilds if all she said was true. While Yang and Ruby had at least been camping and grown up in the woods themselves.

Nothing much changed after the sisters were done with their work either save Blake’s mood improving. The Faunus girl had been getting crankier seemingly every hour over the two day engine scavenging. Weiss had assumed it was fear of the White Fang finding them however it seemed their actions in Vale had sent them scampering for the shadows something Weiss took a little pride in.

Sadly it all become much more of the same after they took off. They’d fly through the skies, careful to avoid Nevermores. Occasionally blasting some of the more aggressive one’s out of the sky with well-placed Sniper Fire, trick flying, shotgun blasts or Glyphs to hold the cawing beasts in place. Then they’d land somewhere seemingly isolated, hunt, kill Grim, cook, eat, sleep and then start it all over again.

Even the battles were dreadfully humdrum to Weiss at this point, even when trying to limit her Dust usage, a tricky thing for someone used to having all the Dust she needed at her finger tips. It got to the point where Weiss had found herself ‘suggested’ into the back of their battles using her Glyphs to slow the Grim or speed up her allies and only using Dust to defend herself if something got by them. 'Support' was not a position she’d ever expected or wanted to be in. It was stressful trying to keep up with the needs of three allies as they fought their own battles and Weiss knew she ‘needed’ to be perfect!

Of course they were all alive still so she must have been doing something right but that didn’t make the constant mind numbing and hectic battles any more pleasant. Despite having to adjust for allies and her low ammo supply Ruby and Zwei were endlessly entertained by slaughtering masses of Grimm. While Blake just seemed to be happy to leave Forever Fall, but Weiss was bored and frustrated, a matter that she and Yang were in a like-mind of.

The blonde had been growing crankier as the Grimm continued to harass them. If Weiss had to guess Yang was frustrated by the string of weak opponents who she barely needed allies to cut her teeth on let alone be challenged by. To say fighting had gone from being a matter of survival, to training to a tedious and repetitive chore like cleaning up after a child’s tantrums would not be inaccurate. Not that the two women were united by their mutual frustration, in fact quite the opposite.

In a small rocky clearing filled with dirt and dust lilac eyes glared down at blue, hands rested on hips and lips thinned into frowns. “No! I refuse, I won’t even consider it!” Weiss snapped, slashing her hands through the air in an X shape.

Yang groaned, rolling back on her feet and looking over to where Ruby and Zwei were watching a pig roast on a spit and Blake sat watching them from within the ship, feline ears up and alert.

“Come on Princess, you’ve been whining about needing a change of clothes and Blake has worked really hard on this.”

“Wanting not to be covered in filth at the end of the day is foul but I’ll gladly take it over wearing
the uniform of some, some…” Weiss grit her teeth as insult after insult flashed through her mind. The mere presence of Blake and the looming reminder of her own use in the wilds stilling the bile on her tongue. “Criminals,” Weiss finally settled on.

Folding her arms and huffing Weiss muttered, “I’m not wearing some worn out hand-me-downs and that’s final. We can just purchase some dresses in a town if your contact ever comes through with a mission.”

‘Perhaps… That was a mistake,’ Weiss realized, sliding back and unconsciously reaching for Myrtenaster.

Yang’s eyes seemed to focus in on Weiss as the woman’s presence and body seemed to swell and tense as if preparing to unleash one of her customary explosions of fire and Aura. Then she did something unexpected; Yang sucked in a breath and returned her glare to one of an annoyed scowl over unbridled rage. Flicking her, somehow, still shiny gold hair over her shoulder Yang sighed and spoke in a tight quiet voice. “Weiss, I get it, we’re all on edge, we’re all tired and dealing with these garbage Grimm every day and the dirt isn’t helping. I know this is an adjustment period, I know the ships crammed-.”

“More than crammed with all those engine parts suck in there,” Weiss muttered, she was of half a mind to sleep in the cockpit save for how cold it got.

“I get that, and I know this must be frustrating for you, trust me we’re all feeling it even if we don’t show it. But this,’ Yang waved a hand at Weiss, “attitude, is not going to help. If you want some time alone to decompress and think Weiss just ask for it, don’t try and chase me of by getting snippy.”

“Don’t talk down to me like I’m some child!” Weiss shouted back.

“Then stop acting like one when people are trying to do something nice for you,” Yang said.

Weiss bit back a retort, spun on her heel and marched away from Yang, ignoring Blake as she went down to squat in-front of the fire opposite of Ruby. The red-tipped brunette was looking into the fire, her silver eyes sparkling with a child’s wonder at the crackling flames in the centre of the dirt circle.

“Warm,” Ruby murmured with a satisfied hum as she rubbed her hands and stared at the crackling pork that Weiss was frankly trying to avoid looking at, no matter how good it smelt.

Weiss merely glared into the flames, resting her hands so close that without the protective presence of her Aura the heat stung them as her chest tightened and constricted in on itself.

“Hey Weiss,” Ruby said suddenly.

“Yes?”

“You have that time manipulation Glyph right?” asked the red hooded girl.

A little thrown by the sudden line of enquiry Weiss blinked and nodded as she said, “Yes though it’s hard to use it on anything but myself or something I’m connected to.”

“I see, so could you like, stick Myrtenaster into the pig and make it cook faster? Or would you
need to speed the fire or the whole area?” Ruby asked.

‘That... was a very good question,’ Weiss realized and her weary mind was not supplying an answer forthright. “Well, you see it works like…” Weiss began, happy to be explaining the intricacies of such an interesting subject.

Some ways behind the duo Yang slipped into the Bullhead and slumped inside with a groan next to Blake. “Great, I snapped her head off,” She moaned, running a hand through her hair.

“I’m sure it will be fine,” Blake said simply as she continued to slip a needle through the thick White Fang jacket.

Yang did not share her friend’s sentiment, she sucked in deep breaths and tried to cool her burning skin as she flexed her fingers and fought down the urge to go out and pick a fight with a Boartusk to work off some steam. “Gods when did I go from big sister to the caretaker for three? I’m going to get grey hairs.”

“I hope you’re including the dog in that count,” Blake answered, jabbing the pin through the white jacket in a threatening manner. Yang hadn’t known that was possible but she was certainly impressed.

Rolling onto her side Yang chuckled and said, “I’ll behave...” She glanced at the jacket and its small pile of its compatriots at Blake’s side along with a few sets of pant and boots. ‘It is amazing we even have room to sleep,’ she thought, glancing at the pile of metal engine parts, sheets and guns. All the storage spots had been filled with rations and Dust or anything else that might roll around while the main hangar was half filled with the remnants of another Bullhead and clothes.

“Something wrong?” Blake asked as she continued her work. The symbol was gone, the back of the jacket now a little more tattered looking but clean, functional and a rather dull dishwater grey over bone white.

“Nothing really, just, wow, you’ve done a good job, I guess you got some experience in your last line of work?” Yang asked carefully.

A silence lingered for a moment as Blake seemingly weighed up discussing her years in the White Fang before she finally pulled the thread out and cut it lose with a single flick of her nail. Tossing the loose grey jacket onto the reclining blonde she said, “A bit, there weren’t exactly many clothing stores that would serve us, even less out here and I doubt they sold what we needed anyway.” Her words were calm but accompanied by an almost disinterested sigh that worried Yang.

“Well it looks great!” Yang said jovially, holding up the simple jacket in front of her before pressing it against her chest to see how it fit. She was pleased to see it matched her shoulder width fairly well if a bit loosely.

“It’s no problem,” Blake said.

“Seriously Blake, you’re awesome, I can really only sew up tears, and this will be really useful for us. Want me to take care of the hunting or something tomorrow?” Yang asked.

She was rewarded with a small grin before Blake fell back into her usual indifferent half glare and said, “It’s no big deal, just tedious really, especially given how tough they are.”
“I was gonna mention that, these feel like the same material as my jacket and I bought this baby to last you know?” She inwardly cringed at her choice of words but was relieved to see Blake send her one of those cheeky smirks.

“Say what you will the White Fang takes it’s branding seriously,” Blake said.

“Hehe, I bet, say does this stuff block out stains too? I can’t imagine they’d hold the sheeny white look with people getting into gun fights and sneaking around forests, as we’ve plainly seen,” Yang said, subtly motioning to the tiny specks of green on Weiss’s clothing.

“Indeed, it’d completely ruin the aesthetic,” Blake said. For a moment she’d seemed almost jovial before something seemed to occur to her and she looked ready to close off again.

Shooting up Yang said, “So do any come in micro size for our princess over there? Maybe that’d be more her style?”

Blake cast her a sidelong glance and said, “I don’t think you can talk down to anyone about jacket sizes Yang.”

“Point, but at least I can close mine.” She said, leaning down and grinning up at the dark haired girl.

Blake rolled her eyes but smiled a little and said, “You can relax Yang I’m not so fragile I’ll break because Weiss acting like a brat. We’re all getting sick of things as they are, it was bound to happen, and I can’t exactly... blame her for not wanting to wear these.”

“Hmm, maybe,” Yang said with a frown. “Still it’d be better if we could all try to get along and frankly without the symbol these are just clothes, clothes she needs given all the complaints.” Yang’s shoulder sagged a little, “Not that I can blame her for being annoyed, fighting all these trash tier Grimm is driving me spare!” She said, slapping her boots against the Bullhead’s frame with gentle kicks.

“It’s because we keep moving, the elder Grim know to stay away and even the young one’s learn to avoid long standing camps but at the speed we move we draw new one’s every day,” Blake said, as if by wrote.

“Makes sense,” Yang said, rubbing her chin, “Just humour me Blake, how much fuel do we have left?” Yang said, hoping the girl wouldn't point out they all kept an obsessive eye on the gauge.

“Enough for a few more trips, more if you can hook up a second anti-grav system but as it is... Maybe three more, four at most and we’ll be running on particles. I can think of a few places we might be able to barter with or scavenge for more fuel but... I don’t think any of us want to just keep wandering like this,” Blake said.

“No direction or plan beyond North-East,” Yang said softly. Sighing she slid up and rose to her feet, “Well nothing to do for it now, we can keep travelling for awhile longer, pull more together if we need to and a mission will probably come through soon anyway.” They both ignored that Yang had been saying that for days. “I, am going to go throw on my new jacket before dinner,” Yang announced.

“You don’t need to,” Blake said.
“Need, want, kind of both really, it’s been a week you know, and dips in the stream aren’t doing much for the sweat and Burn Dust smell. Besides I wanna see how I look!” She said, ducking into the cockpit.

Smiling a little Blake shrugged at the other girl’s attitude and began to slide from her perch upon the Bullhead when Weiss strutted over to her. The white haired girl met her gaze and simply said, “Dinner’s ready, if you want some.” It wasn’t angry or tight so much as subdued, but not particularly mournful either Blake felt.

Accepting the small gesture for what it was she nodded and strolled towards the fire when Yang let out an whoop from within the airship before tearing out, half dressed and grinning like mad as she looked over her companions. “Guys grab the food and get in the Bullhead we have our first official mission!”

Before anyone could even speak Ruby blurred past them with an ecstatic cry and leapt into the ship.

“Mission, mission!”

Blake and Weiss looked to one another and shrugged in mutual understanding, “Well, they’re happy.”

“Hurry up or we’ll drag you in like luggage!” Yang shouted as the engines began to hiss and roar to life.

Naturally both girls leapt aboard the ship immediately and slammed the side hatch shut just as Yang launched them into the air.

As Blake slid into her pilots seat she heard Weiss, sounding much more chipper, ask, “So where is this mission?”

“Hm, oh some little framing town a little ways off. Apparently they’ve been stuck in a Grimm siege or something like that, no travellers in or out but the roads look safe so people are taken by surprise,” Yang said from the co-pilot seat. “It’s called-“

“A Sundown Town,” Blake growled, vocal cords stretching and flexing beyond the ken of a humans to vocalise Blake’s disgust. She leaned back against the Bullhead’s interior, arms folded across her chest as she glared a metaphorical hole in the floor.

They’d parked their ship some half a kilometre away from their assigned town and the rest of Blake... crew, friends, allies... whatever she was to call them, were all sitting around her. Ruby held Zwei to her chest in the pilot’s seat while Weiss took up the other seat and Yang leaned on her shoulder against the wall next to Blake, looking at her with concern.

Finally Weiss said, “I don’t believe I am familiar with that term.”

Blake stifled a huff of annoyance and uttered, “You wouldn’t be, none of you would. It’s so subtle in the kingdoms they’re barely the same thing but it’s taken the logic of those signs people put up not letting us, Faunus,” She stressed, “into stores, just applied to an entire town. No Faunus allowed passed sundown, clear out and disappear from sight before you upset the ‘harmony’ of
the village,” She said, voice cold. “Some towns do it for all outsiders if they’re suspicious, but mostly it’s just to the Faunus. If we don’t leave…” Blake trailed off with a shrug, “It depends on the town, but one way or the other you’re always gone before sundown and left to the mercy of the Grimm.”

“That’s not fair though!” Ruby shouted, Zwei adding a little yip of support as his tongue lolled out.

“Life’s often unfair,” Blake said. The fact that unfairness was generally aimed towards the Faunus, well that was just poor luck wasn’t it? Or so some humans said.

“I’m surprised places like that weren’t… targeted,” Weiss said uncomfortably. Likely thinking back to the burnt out Schnee Dust stores and trains Blake had seen go up in her time.

“Some were but villages are generally at least a little tough and unpleasant as they are they don’t have any power. No one care’s if a village disappears in the night, they do it all the time. Fighting them was deemed a waste of resources unless the White Fang felt they had good reason,” Blake answered.

“Do we even want to help these assholes now?” Yang asked, white jacket draped open over her shoulders and gloved hands squeaking as she clenched her fist in anger.

Blake almost wanted to say yes, wanted to dismiss the callous villagers and leave them to the fate she knew they’d left so many others to. It would be ironic, it would be justice and she’d keep her hands clean. ‘It’s so easy to hate,’ Blake thought to herself, but that wasn’t who Blake was anymore, it wasn’t who she wanted to be, even if it was hard. “Leaving them to die, I don’t think we can do that,” She said without enthusiasm.

Ruby was putting but the girl blew out a breath and said, “They may have done bad things but maybe we can change their minds if we help them? And… I’m not really OK with leaving people to die even if they are jerks.”

“They aren’t exactly on deaths door Ruby but if you guys are up for it so am I,” Yang said tapping her fists together. “Leaving them to deal with it alone would just be doing the whole eye for an eye thing anyway,” Yang said with a shrug.

“I agree,” Weiss said primly, before an evil little smirk appeared on her face. “We can rake them over the coals on the compensation though.” With that she stood up and flicked the greyed out White Fang vest over her dainty frame.

“Yes I love it!” Yang said, “We’re in need of a few thing after all, and we got here so promptly.”

Blake chuckled and said, “All right, but just don’t expect me to go in unless we have to,” She said, flicking the black cloak over her head and pressing her ears to her skull.

“That’s fair, we can stand guard while Yang and Weiss do the talking!” Ruby said cheerfully, jumping up at Blake’s side like an excited… well puppy.

Weiss and Yang shared a grin as they said, “You won’t be disappointed.”

And like that they began their first official mission.
Gambol Shroud, to leap about playfully, for such a rough and brutal looking weapon wielded by such a quiet enigmatic soul Weiss honestly never felt it fit. But now, watching Blake leap, flicker, flash, blur, swing and practically dance around her in a wide orbular pattern. Bullets flying, blades slashing, ribbon striking and beams of purple Aura flying. Watching as After Images appeared and vanished in an instant only for its killer to drop dead a moment later the heiress could truly see the name fit Blake’s fighting style.

Blake Blake’s acrobatic attacks were serving to shield them from the hundreds of raging Nevermores, her blade and ribbons creating sharpened mobile barrier. Weiss played her part by slowing the charge of the land bound Grim with her Glyphs while Ruby and Yang fired into the chaos.

“CROOAAH!” The Nevermore crowed from high above them.

The quartet watched as the Grim swarming them began to break off from their direct charge in favour of circling the solid metre of space carved out by Blake’s attacks. Some still tried to charge in but were quickly obliterated. However the shift was jarring and with the Murder of Nevermores circling them they were left in near pitch blackness.

“The big one’s in charge!” Weiss shouted.

Ruby and Yang moved in a blur, the Nevermore made shadows beaten back by Yang’s glowing hair, the blonde leapt onto the blade of Ruby’s Scythe and aimed her gauntlets towards the ground. “I’m gonna charge, Blake cut a path for us, Weiss speed us up and cover us, Blake guard Weiss!” Ruby ordered.

With a quick flick of her wrist Weiss summoned a shiny blue and white Glyph beneath Ruby’s feet.

As the Nevermore above cawed Ruby spun to face it and Blake flipped through the air, cleaver held tight in hand as she cried, “Hyaa!” Flipping over Weiss the Faunus slammed her blade into the ground and unleashed a violet sword-beam that tore into the Grim and was followed by a Ruby, reduced to a red blur in Weiss’s eyes.

Blake’s sword-beam lasted for nearly eight metres and with Ruby’s speed and the shock of the Grim the sisters shot past the monsters with ease. As the blast faded and the Nevermore came into sight Ruby heard Yang cock Ember Celica and just as Yang fired Ruby slammed down on the trigger and blasted the ground beneath them, both sisters hurtling over the massive horde of Grim. Ruby arched her body back and with a heave swung Crescent Rose towards the circling Nevermore and launched Yang forward with another crack of sniper fire.

Spinning around Ruby leapt of a platform Glyph Weiss had summoned up and in a burst of Rose petals launched towards the rage filled flock of miniature Nevermores. Spinning Crescent Rose before her at blinding speeds Ruby tore through the offending Grimm and shot towards the tree line to offer suppressing fire on the horde.

Yang smirked as she heard the tell-tale chime of Weiss’s Glyph around her and let loose a powerful blast from Ember Celica as she tore through the speed enhancing Glyph. The wind whipping around her became a roaring vacuum as Yang torpedoed through the air and in an instant slammed right into the Nevermore’s side with a crack of force that echoed above the forest.

The Grimm let out a strangled cry as it was tackled out of the sky! Yang wrapped her arms around
the screeching Nevermore’s neck and unloaded a fiery blast into one of its wings as they descended towards the canopy with an explosive crash.

With their leader gone the Grim fell into an anarchic mess of gnashing teeth and snarling maws. They lunged at Blake and Weiss with reckless abandon only to run head first into Glyphs stronger than steel and the unrelenting sword slashes of Blake. “Jump!” Blake shouted as a mass of dust and spiralling rose petals barrelled down on the horde of Grim.

Weiss leapt into the air with Blake at her side, calling on another Glyph for them to leap off of as Ruby unleashed and explosive tornado off air like a missile upon the Grim. She ducked down on the ground as the air above her surged forward, sending the screeching and howling Grim flying in every direction.

Leaping from the Glyph Weiss landed at Ruby’s side, the girl was panting but eagerly foisting her gun at the injured and enraged Grim. Blake was already cutting a path through some of the larger groups of Grim that were trying to reorient themselves when the nearby tree line exploded in a wave of fire and a burning tree trunk was launched into a raging Ursa with a thunk!

“Mama bird is down girls!” Yang cheered, slamming her fists together and grinning as she eyed the Grim spread throughout the wide clearing.

“Now all that’s left is the clean up!” Ruby cheered, her Aura seemingly having recovered from the strain of her charge the girl spun on her heel and called, “Weiss and I will herd-em you guys finish them off!!”

“You’re sure you’ll be all right?” Weiss asked?

“I got this, you OK without your Dust?” Ruby asked.

“I’d be embarrassed if I ever needed to use Dust on this rabble,” Weiss answered before skating across a sparkling line of Glyphs. Ruby shot off from behind her while Yang and Blake tore their way through the Grim’s remaining forces, all of them too savage and stupid to realize they needed to retreat.

‘Not that we’d give them the chance,’ Weiss thought as she sliced down a snarling Beowolf.

It wasn’t long before the horde was extinguished, the town saved and a victorious group of Huntresses returned for their compensation. Some however had other objectives in mind before collecting their pay.

Yang was standing in a heavily brick worked tavern with thick timber pillars, tables and bar around her. She was talking to a portly moustached man in a lose fitting white shirt, dark pants who was cleaning an empty glass. When tracking her father, who was tracking her uncle Qrow, there really was only one place in any area to look, the place with the most alcohol.

“So you saw these guys? You’re sure?” Yang stressed as she held the Scroll up in front of the man.

“Yep, the blonde one passed through and asked just what you’re asking and left right quick some time ago I think. The dark haired fella was drinking here for a while, cranky bastard to, but he skipped off without paying his tab when a lightning storm sprung up somewhere,” The man said.
“Lightning storm?” Yang asked. Had it been a battle perhaps, or did her uncle just feel like shouting at the sky?

“Damnest thing I’ve seen in a awhile, lightning raining some half a mile away all in one spot for a few minutes then nothing. Now are you going to pay for that man’s tab?” He harrumphed.

“What? Oh no, no, I’m just a bounty Hunter you see, he’s not my responsibility.” Yang chuckled as she reversed out of the bar. Sighing she stared at the images of her father and uncle for a moment, ‘Dammit guys where are you!?’ She asked herself silently. The lightning could have been a battle between Hunters but that told her next to nothing, especially given how long ago it must have happened.

Shrugging her shoulders, the grey jacket Blake had whipped up for her rippling as she did so Yang swallowed her concerns and marched off towards the local tailor. Weiss had insisted that she ‘needed’ to see them when they first arrived and before their meeting with the mayor to finalise their pay. The duo had been a bit shocked by the subdued reaction to their victory but Yang supposed Grim assaults, even weirdly strategic one’s, were at least somewhat the norm here, same for Hunters wiping them out.

Accepting her logic Yang strolled down the cobblestone road passed thick brickwork houses, easily slipping by the habitants. Yang was not surprised to see no horns, extra ears or tails amongst the populace but still disappointed and frankly, a little weirded out. ‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen so many people without spotting at least one Faunus,’ She mused. But then, she’d been living in a storage locker and working for Junior near the ghettos, she probably saw more Faunus than most city living humans ever did.

Yang pushed her annoyance down as she thought of Ruby and Blake hovering outside of town with Zwei and watching over the ship. Blake's ears still covered by her cloak should a villager pass. ‘I hate this place,’ She thought bitterly as she approached the small circular boutique Weiss had shot toward upon their arrival. It wasn't just the locals prejudice that bothered her, Yang felt... isolated without the others. She'd grown used to being alone in Vale but now with Ruby, Zwei, Blake and Weiss around her all the time in closed quarters the blonde was remembering how much she'd loved being around people and now that they weren't at her side everything felt wrong.

Pushing open the steel bolted door with an easy shove Yang practically jumped back as Weiss strutted out of the store, several outfits over one arm, the top one being a light blue dress. She had a victoriously smug smile on her face as she said, "I negotiated them down to a generous donation. Now we'll have sleep wear and some backup clothes, I even got Blake a Yukata just like she asked for."

Yang smirked at her friend and said, "Well, well, colour me impressed, when did you get my sizes?" She joked.

Weiss huffed and said, "That was all too easy, you left your shirt over the back of the co-pilots seat when we took off."

"Hehe, fair enough, I guess we should find the village head and work our magic there too. I spied a supply depot with everything we should need, including mouthwash at last," Yang said with an exaggerated groan.

Weiss nodded and said, "Indeed, lets take them for all their worth."

Under the sunny blue sky on a damaged wooden fence lined path surrounded by grassy fields and
trees in the distance two cloaked figured stood in silence, their bulky airship parked some ways behind them.

Ruby’s red cloak fluttered in the light breeze as she lazily scanned the surroundings through her scope, hoping to spy Yang and Weiss on their way back or a lingering Grim. Off to her side and still in her long black cloak with her ears pressed down Blake leaned against one of the only remaining wooden fence frames, golden eyes wide and alert. To say that conversation between the socially awkward sniper and her taciturn Ballistic Chain Scythe using companion was oppressively quiet and awkward would be an understatement.

Spinning Ruby spied Blake’s face through her scope, the Faunus’s appearance was mostly hidden behind a white scarf and her hood. The silence only seemed to grow as Blake focussed on Crescent Rose and Ruby rushed to fill it as she said, “I, uh, like your cloak… I have one too, it’s red.”

Some small vocalisation that Ruby couldn’t interpret came from Blake as she said, “I noticed.”

It didn’t sound hostile, maybe she was even amused, Ruby didn’t know! Dropping Crescent Rose to her side, eyes swivelling in her head Ruby sought a new topic, any topic. Glancing back at the town she asked, “So uh, where do you think we’ll go after this? I know Yang and Weiss are meant to be getting fuel.”

Blake shrugged and answered, “I’m not sure, probably North-East. There’s strings of villages in that direction and we’d want to avoid the mountains because of the Grimm population in some areas. Yang and I worked out the how much fuel we’ll need before making another pit stop so if that all goes well we should be fine and this towns wealthy enough to afford it anyway.”

“I guess you have a lot of experience with this kind of stuff, it’s really cool... Like how you know all this stuff I mean, not the uh, other bit,” Ruby said, shuffling her feet.

“I’ve picked things up, you will too in time, you’re already doing well,” Blake said.

“Really!?” Ruby squeaked happily before realizing how childish she sounded. Coughing to deepen her voice she said, “Thanks, this has been well, really cool honestly. I mean going out, travelling fighting Grimm and even saving a village, it really feels like we’re doing something good here and its fun! I mean I wish I had more bullets but I’m getting used to conserving ammo and with you guys here I don’t need to be as jumpy and flippy anymore, though it’s still fun,” She snorted.

Blake didn’t speak but her eyes seemed to soften as she looked at Ruby, something like a smile becoming evident by the shift in her eyes. “You’re an optimist, that’s a good trait Ruby, you shouldn’t lose it.” Blake finally said.

“Thanks!” Ruby said automatically, even as the words and the sheer roughness and sense of weight Blake’s tone seemed to carry. Looking into the Faunus girls eyes Ruby saw her concerns validated as Blake was once again off in her own world, tense but limber, eyes scanning everything but looking at nothing. Ruby couldn’t claim to be as good of a people person as Yang but as much as she buried herself in layers of cloth and indifference Blake’s mood was easy enough to read, especially for a trained warrior.

Pulling up her hood and scratching her cheek Ruby said, “So do you know any nice villages? Or maybe you heard of some cool nomads? I’ve heard lots about them and I guess it’s kind of what we are now.”

Eyes widening and refocussing on her Blake seemed to mull the question over before she finally said, “I know a few. Some are mostly Faunus nomads or towns isolated enough and pragmatic
enough not to care about who they trade with for lodging or tools. I can’t say how good of an idea visiting any of them is, if they still exist,” Blake mused.

“Ah, I see,” Ruby said. It seemed Blake was worried about running across her old friend which Ruby supposed made sense, of course that only rankled her sense of fairness more! Seeing a tiny black form flying across the sky in the distance Ruby nodded towards it and said, “Hey, bet ya I can hit it between the eyes without looking.”

Blake gave her a quizzical look like she found Ruby some slightly absurd curiosity before her golden eyes shot to the Nevermore soaring on the air currents up above. “Without looking?” She asked.

Ruby grinned, this was something she could do, taking one last glance at the Grimm Ruby turned away and watched the trees in the distance. She watched how the leaves rippled and blended, she saw the ebb and flow of the clouds and the calculation ran through her head in a flash before she hoisted Crescent Rose into the air and fired. The power blast rang through the area with a deafening crack and Ruby silently rejoiced at the sudden arching of Blake’s eyebrows.

Turning around Ruby saw the few remains of the Nevermore fading to nothing before they could even hit the ground. “Hehe, told you I could do it, and don’t say it didn’t count just cos it exploded Yang already tired that,” She added with a wink.

Blake’s eyes drifted from the sky to Ruby and the Faunus pushed off from the fence and said, “Double or nothing.”

One might think it odd to negotiate the price after the job was done, however Weiss and Yang came from background in big business and negotiating with gang leaders and debt breakers. Add in that they’d both done more than a little research on their chosen career path as Huntresses and they knew that the price listed on the Hunter Boards was one made to grab attention. So even if already agreed upon by Hunter and village someone would try to negotiate up or down. In fact, that’s what the women had been counting on.

“… I’m just saying, the reward for this mission was laid out under the impression the problem was much more severe than it turned out to be,” Said the balding village head. Greying hair framed the base of his skull and the, rather spry, older man had a bristly moustache atop his lips and a loose fitting tunic and vest.

“That really speaks more to the quality of our work than the ease of the mission sir,” Weiss said firmly her face illuminated only by the burning candles.

Yang leaned against the village heads home’s flat stone wall and said, “Plus there’s our response time to consider. I mean, if you want to try and penalise us for doing the job too quickly or too well shouldn’t you also reward us for how fast we got here?”

“My partner has an excellent point, it would have taken another Hunter at least a week to get here, but we came the moment your mission came up saving you all sorts of trouble,” Weiss said.

“Well yes that’s true-."

“I mean you did say the Grimm were getting bold enough to test your defences right? You made it sound super serious,” The blonde said.

“It was, truly it’s been terrible, and with all the repairs-."
“Odd then that we didn’t see any damage Mr Cobalt, maybe you could show us around town and where your defences were compromised? Just to put our minds at ease,” Weiss said, eyes focussing into slits as she glared at the man.

Yang, enjoying her role as the relaxed cool cop in the routine snorted and said, “Yeah we need that kind of info for the reports you know? Beacon, the Councils, Hunter Review Boards, all that kind of stuff.”

“I can uh, easily provide you with an itemised list of the damages,” He said hastily. “But perhaps we should get back on track, our town would be more than happy to give you the fuel and Dust as discussed and I can send the payment right away.”

The duo grinned at one another in victory as Cobalt signed the commission that would grant them their compensation from the town’s stores and suppliers just by showing it to them. With a final sharp scratch Cobalt’s pen flew from the page and he slid the slip towards Weiss who took it up with a gracious and beatific smile.

“Thank you for your time, it has been a pleasure,” Weiss said as she rose to leave as Yang pushed off the wall to follow after her the duo heard the sound of Cobalt’s pen tapping against his desk.

“I can’t imagine it’s comfortable for you living in a tiny airship like that,” Cobalt said slowly. The duo half turned to face him eyebrows arched in curiosity as he spoke. “And given all you’ve done for our fine town perhaps you would all be interested in staying the night? We’d be honoured to host such fine young Huntresses with what we have,” He said. The unsung implication being that anything they used while there would be detracted from their bill.

It was Weiss who spoke, she smiled sweetly at the man and said, in a high dulcet voice, “Oh we would simply be delighted to stay!” Her tone shifted as her eyed focussed in on the man with cold intent. “But I’m afraid one of our number wouldn’t be welcome here after dark.”

Spinning forward Weiss ignored the slight flexing of Yang’s Aura as the blonde’s hair lit up momentarily and they disappeared out the door in an instant.

Yang spun around and grinned, "We won’t let the door hit us on the way out.”

And like that, they were done.

“Arf! Arf!” Zwei barked cheerfully as his stubby legs carried him across the grassy field and after a particularly sturdy stick. Or if he was lucky an overly confident Grimm found itself on the reviewing end of a deadly head-butt.

Ruby was grinning ecstatically, proud of herself for having convinced Blake to first throw the stick for Zwei. Even if it was just to get the corgi out of the way and the job of hurling the slobbery stick had now fallen to Ruby alone as her quiet companion watched she still felt happy. ‘Step one of operation get Blake to like Zwei is a complete success!’ She thought.

Suddenly Zwei tore off from his charge and shot right passed a tree he’d been hovering around earlier and towards the town.

“Play times over it seems,” Blake said in what Ruby guessed was her joking tone.

Spinning around Ruby saw the shining bouncy gold hair of her sister and the stark icy blue of Weiss’s dress in the distance. Both girls had metal crates from the Bullhead under their arms on their shoulders and in Yang’s case balanced on her head.
“They’re back, Blake let’s go!” Ruby cheered before she charged off towards her sister and friend with her arms outstretched.

Yang predicted her sister and canines path and raised her arms up high and braced herself for the combined tackle-hug they delivered, sliding back across the dirt as she felt them impact against her chest.

“Did it go well? Did you guys win? Did you get the bullets!?” Ruby asked excitedly.

Zwei who had inserted himself between the two sisters simply yipped and licked Yang’s cheek as the blonde laughed. “Haha, all right, all right you two, yes Ruby I got you a clip of Sniper Rounds,” -“Wooh!”- Ruby cheered. “And Zwei,” Thee blonde started, turning towards the panting corgi that looked her dead in the eyes, “Weiss is the one with dog treats.”

In an instant Zwei swivelled and shook his way out from between the sisters and leapt onto one of the smaller girls crates as Weiss giggled at his presence, “Arf!”

“Traitor,” Yang said with a chuckled as Ruby slowly extricated herself.

“Dogs are notoriously unreliable,” Blake said sardonically as she marched up to them and slipped the white crate from Yang’s head.

“Aw, I wanted to show off my amazing balance,” Yang said, winking at the dark haired girl.

“Hm, consider me enlightened,” Blake retorted with a slight smirk as she snuck around Weiss who was tempting Zwei with jerky and picked up one of the girl’s crates. Ruby quickly followed Blake’s example and the quarter, plus Zwei, had their ship re-packed and in the air before evening hit.

Later that night they’d parked their ship upon a large hill overlooking a wide river buzzing with sparkly golden fireflies. Zwei splashed about happily in the water as the four Huntresses reclined, relaxed and generally loafed about near the landed Bullhead’s open hatch. Stomachs full, bottled drinks in hand along with the full moon and the warmth of summer in the air providing all the comfort the group needed as they enjoyed the fruits of their labours.

“Hey guys, how about a toast, to our first successful mission!” Ruby said, holding up her bottle of Shcnnee-Cola.

“Wouldn’t this be our second?” Yang asked.

“Sis don’t ruin the moment,” Ruby instructed with a light tutting.

Weiss didn’t speak, instead she lifted her bottle from her lap and held it vaguely in the direction of Blake who grinned at the girl as they tapped their bottles together quickly joined by the two sisters.

“To our second successful mission,” They intoned.

“And may there be many more!” Yang cheered before taking a deep gulp of her, definitely not a cola, drink only to start spluttering as her Scroll began to beep wildly. Flicking the device open she skimmed the message and said, “Hey girls, I think we got another job lined up.”

Chapter End Notes
Hi there, I hope everyone enjoyed the Errant Knights / RWBY's first official mission! Please feel free to leave any questions, comments or critiques you might have, I'm always looking to improve or hear about what worked and what people want more of.

This chapter was initially meant to be the opening chapter for a longer adventure fic but as its size and character interaction scope ballooned that became less reasonable. Eventually I decided this should be another stand alone story before the next extended adventure as a sign of the cast both getting used to each other and their new line of work to better set up and spread out their characterization for the next 'big' adventure.

One thing I tried to do here was world build for life outside the kingdoms, travel and well missions and everything else as well. I also wanted to show the tensions that can rise from people, especially people new to each other living in closed quarters but to also show each of the cast making little gestures to try and smooth thing over amongst themselves.
Raucous Ruins - Meet The Contracor

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The blaring, bright orange sun rose up in the distant horizon, illuminating the faintly mist covered mountains. Dew glistened upon patches of hardy grass and moss that grew upon the mountains surface. The serene beauty of the morning contrasted against the towering, yet crumbling, remains of a stone fortress.

Down on the ground and dashing between the cracked pillars and overgrown masonry black and white figures bellowed in fury, their glowing eyes shine with a crimson light.

The Grim were met by by a trio of blurs, one black, one white and one red. Bullets fired and ricocheted while shining Glyphs spun into existence with a sharp but lyrical hum. The Huntresses flashed, danced and launched themselves through the ruins for cover as they tore into the tide of monsters.

The three Huntresses battle, if looked at perhaps by a veteran or with a birds eye view, was clearly built around protection and misdirection.

Specifically the Huntresses were guarding the tallest remaining pillar, carved from blueish stone, layered with inscriptions and marked by a ruined ladder, the pillar was all that remained of the fortresses great tower. In ages past it would have been used to light signal flares that could be seen for miles around to warn of Grim and send messages.

And, spiritually, it was still being used as such, if grudgingly.

Two thin slivers of silver metal were held high against the sky by the tips of two black-gloved fingers as gun fire and growls echoed through the air.

"Come on, come on," a rough feminine voice muttered.

Yang Xiao Long stood atop the flat stone top of the tower. Her golden hair hanging down her back and standing out starkly against her battered brown jacket and black shorts. Her right arm was held high in the air as she stood on her tip toes and muttered irritably as she eyed the battle down below.

A tiny glass circle at the top of the Scroll flashed blue, "Finally!" Yang groaned, before pocketing the Scroll and leaping from her perch to join the fray with a holler of joy.

The Bullhead's engine let out a sharp shriek as the vessel rocketed into the air with a powerful 'vroom!'

The four friends and their dog were all scattered around the Bullhead's cockpit. Blake was in her customary position in the drivers seat. Weiss was at her side though rather than doing any co-piloting she was downing one of their coffee rations with gusto, while Ruby spun Zwei in the air applauding the corigis successful guarding of the ship.
Yang was hanging back in the doorway to the cockpit and flicking her way through the backlog of messages on her battered Scroll. "All that just to get a freaking signal!" Yang cried, arms waving in the air like she really did care.

"At least you **got** a message," Weiss said in a huffy voice from her co-pilot seat. She unconsciously straightened the long, once White Fang, jacket she'd taken to wearing on her off days.

"Yeah Yang, I mean think about it, if you weren't so tall we might not have gotten a signal at all!" Ruby cheered.

Yang shrugged, "Next time I think I should just hurl one of you into the air to get a Signal. Seriously they'd better repair that stupid support tower soon, this is freaking ridiculous."

"Did we at least get a good job from all this? I mean, we did destroy some ancient ruins for it," Blake said from the pilots seat.

"Worth it," Ruby said, dropping to the floor where she started giving Zwei belly rubs.

Yang's lips shifted from grouchy to a full on smirk as she flicked through the details on her glowing blue screen. "Oh yeah, ladies, we got a high paying mission and a new type at that. Its time for some S and R!"

Blake and Weiss glanced at one another from their respective seats and shrugged.

Ruby on the other hand leapt into the air and shouted, "Search and rescue!"

Over the last few months the quartet had grown used to both travelling together and the new locations. Naturally this had been more of an adjustment for some than others, Blake taking to travel like an old friend and Weiss...

"Gah, get this off of me!" The white haired Huntress shrieked as she thrashed her way through a gargantuan spider web and tromped on the bright green foliage.

Trees nearly as tall as skyscrapers rose into the air, their ancient forms tough and hardy from centuries of undisturbed growth. Winding their way up their trunks and across the forest floor were layers of vines and bushes that made even seeing one's feet a difficult matter. And naturally, where nature went undisturbed by the hands of human and Faunus, pawed, taloned and multi-legged species thrived. Until Weiss had walked straight into a Bulk-Spiders web at-least.

"I got you Weiss!" Ruby shouted, dropping the thick green tarp she'd pulled from the Bullhead Ruby jumped to her friends aid.

They quickly set about trying to untangle the thick weaves of silk while an eight eyed arachnid glared down at hatefully, only to be caught in a staring contest with Zwei.

Weiss huffed and stomped before finally shouting, "I hate nature! Why aren't Blake and Yang helping!?"
Blake was sitting silently in the Bullhead's cockpit, her fingers tapping against the command console as she looked over their vessels stats for the third time.

She was stalling, procrastinating to hide her nerves she knew, but it wasn't as though she could just expect the others to understand-

"So, still stalling for time?" Yang chirped as she strode into the cockpit and leaned on the head of Blake's seat.

'Well I've been wrong before,' Blake thought, almost ruefully. Outwardly she said, "I was thinking maybe you could all take Zwei on this mission and I'd stand guard on the ship."

"Survival 101 Blake," Yang tisked, "Grim don't kill cute doggies, its us bipeds that tick-em off. I don't think leaving you here alone will end well. No offence," The blonde added.

Blake huffed and continued her scanning as Yang slid off the chair and squatted at her side sending her that annoying searching look she did when the blonde tried to get them to talk. "You're worried cos we're working with a stranger right?" Yang finally ventured.

Sighing Blake flicked the console off and nodded, "Yes. Are you sure there wasn't anything else about this mission you might not have mentioned?"

Yang shrugged, "All I know is what it said. Meet up with some nomad clan, S&R for some prospector, tight area grid search, with us mostly along as back up for some Hunter name Oobleck."

"Still," Yang continued, "I get what you're saying, you are still technically wanted and our contractors a Hunter. Heck, you just being a Faunus might be enough to set him off, and then there's Weiss's dad, if what she's said is true it wouldn't shock me if he'd go to some pretty insane lengths to find her, outsiders are risky..."

"But we really need the fuel money," Blake finished for her friend.

Yang's shoulders went limp as she nodded at Blake and slowly rose to her feet. One of Yang's gloved hands patted Blake's shoulder and the blonde said, "Listen, no matter what happens Ruby and I are with you, and Weiss for that matter. Worst comes to worse we forage for awhile and... Say," Yang said, a mischievous smile spreading on her lips that caused Blake's ears to twitch. "You still have that cloak, poncho thing right?"

"Yeees," Blake said slowly.

To that, Yang just grinned wider.

Ruby and Weiss turned to the Bullhead as they heard Yang bang on the ships side like a drum roll.

Weiss's glower hardened as she pointed an accusing finger at the dark and gold haired duo, mouth open only to get a face full of white jacket and an orange scarf.

"What are you doing!?" Weiss demanded as she pulled the coat and Yang's scarf into her arms and glared.
"Its your disguise, can't have old man Schnee hearing where you last were right?" Yang said cheerfully. "Put on that coat and tie my scarf around your head and no one will recognise you!"

"Oh, I see," Weiss muttered as she quickly flung the long jacket over her combat skirt and draped Yang's scarf over her head. "Is that what you were doing instead of helping us?"

Yang rubbed the back of her head and said, "Heh, sorry, had to help Blake get dressed-"

"That's an exaggeration," Blake interrupted, startling the blonde.

"Bum-dadada!" Yang clapped, before waving her arms at Blake as the Faunus hopped out of their Bullhead, face hidden by a white scarf and her body draped in a black cowl.

"Introducing Miss B and Miss W!" Yang cheered, waving her arms at Weiss and Blake.

Ruby, already in her sisters rhythm blurred to Yang's side and said, "They're too cool and mysterious for full names!"

Weiss snorted in a most unladylike fashion while Blake rolled her amber eyes, the only part of her face still visible, as she fondly said, "Dorks."

Yang slipped her around Ruby's neck and hugged Ruby close to her chest and said, "We are amazing and adorable and you love it!"

"Shouldn't we be called Black and White?" Weiss asked as she finished clumsily tying Yang's scarf around her head.

"Here let me," Blake said, taking the orange cloth in her hands as Weiss stammered out her acceptance.

"No way!" Ruby said, "Full names would totally ruin the mystique!"

Yang merely nodded along with her sister enthusiastically.

"You're both ridiculous-" In an instant Blake spun around, Gambol Shroud in her hands. In the next moment the Huntresses were standing back to back, weapons at the ready as they looked out into the forest.

"What was it?" Ruby asked.

"People approaching, five at least," Blake answered.

Zwei let out a low growl as both his and Blakes ears twitched in unison and the Huntresses strained their eyes, staring deeply into the mass of leaves and branches all around them.

Finally Blake and Zwei, followed by the others, turned to the right. They watched as a single man in thick green and brown clothes that blended in perfectly with his surroundings. Even his face was painted to match the forests colours., and his species was marked with pronounced boar tusks jutting out from the back of his head. He walked with arms upraised and came to a stop several feet away.
"You are the team of Huntresses called by Oobleck, yes?" he asked, his voice sharp but quiet. They relaxed slowly and Ruby nodded, "Yep that's us!"

The man reeled back a bit, his lips dropping into a frown before he spoke. "I am Vil, I speak for the Meral clan and have been asked by the doctor to guide you to our camp. We should move quickly, and quietly, even in these woods walked by our ancestors the Grims savagery is unrelenting."

"OK," Ruby said awkwardly. "Just let us finish covering our ship."

Vil nodded and stayed silent, as the Huntresses closed the Bullhead's door and pulled the camouflage tarp over its frame. While they worked each of them spotted several more identically dressed people scattered throughout the wilderness.

"Blake do you know them?" Weiss asked.

Nodding Blake said, "Meral clan, mixed camp, trustworthy traders, pretty big but tight-knit."

Ruby let out a sigh, well at least they weren't likely to be working with the White Fang then. Once they were done inspecting their handiwork and laying out food and water for Zwei Ruby patted the happy corgi's head and said, "Keep the ship safe while we're gone OK."

"Arf!" Zwei barked in confirmation.

"Anyone tries to get in just mawl em boy and if they're too strong just come get us and we'll do it," Yang added.

"Arf" Zwei confirmed.

"And don't touch my things," Blake added.

Zwei did not bark in conformation.

"He's gonna get in your stuff," Yang chuckled, patting her friend on the back as they all walked towards Vil.

"So are we ready to go?" Weiss asked.

Vil nodded, spun on his heel and began carefully creeping deeper into the forest, the Huntresses followed the man's lead. All around them, the other Meral clan bled back into the foliage and began following them.

As their slow march persisted the Huntresses found themselves more engrossed in their surrounding, and not just because they were watching for people or Grim.

The forest was tropical but still otherworldly and distinct to those most of them were familiar with. Lanky, gnarled trees stretched high into the sky with only faint rays of sunshine breaking through. Natural stone outcroppings and even the occasional piece of rubble that always dotted the landscape were overgrown with vines. Occasionally an animal would shoot by them or scuttle back into hiding.

"So uh," Ruby said, the oppressive silence getting to her. She uncomfortably fiddled with Crescent
Rose wishing a Grim would burst in and break the awkwardness, "How long have you guys been here?"

Vil didn't slow or look back and as before his words were short and clipped. "The Meral clan has wandered these lands for generations, even escaping the horrors the kingdoms unleashed during their Great War. However, we dare not travel up the mountains on the wisdom of our ancestors. Only fools tread there," said their guide.

He was of course talking about the mountain they'd spent the last day flying around. The option of going over it being vetoed due to the high chance of elder Grim nesting there.

"Cool, cool," Ruby murmured, "So uh, do you know the guy whose hiring us?"

"I am... not fit to speak of such things," Vil said. "The elders will introduce you to him, please let us stay quiet lest we lure wrathful company."

Yang patted her sister on the back as they continued their march. The next half an hour was spent in silence, it was only when Blake's ears perked up from beneath her cowl that she said, "We're here."

Before her fellows could even express surprise at that, Vil slipped through a particularly large bush. Upon closer inspection it was actually a camouflage tarp spread out between the trees, just with a thick layer of false brush around it to create the illusion of a bush.

The huntresses slipped through the thick materiel and emerged into what felt like another world.

All around them people in camouflaged clothing hurried back and forth between tents that looked more a part of the forest than a civilisation. New aromas tantalised their weary senses and empty stomachs. Conversation filled the air, the people's accents more languid and yet somehow crisper than the two Vale natives were used to.

A figure waved at them from a large open tent in the distance where they sat surrounded by other nomads, all gathered around a large pan simmering on glowing red coals.

"I think that's our employer," Weiss said.

"The doctor is a good friend to the Meral clan, that is why you are welcome here, but please do nothing to draw attention or offend our fore bearers," Vil said as he led them through the camp and towards the open tent.

"We'll do our utmost to respect your home, thank you, Vil," Weiss said politely as they approached the tent.

The man nodded and stood aside to let them into the wide open tent. Three figured in robes that otherwise resembled Vil's clothes sat before the simmering hot coals where a kettle now rested.

The quartet looked to their would be employer but found only empty space before the man blurred into existence in front of them. His long brown coat flared, his rounded plastic hat tilted on his head and his tiny spectacles nearly flew off. Dark green hair shot out in a mad spiked display that looked like some mix of bed hair and an industrial strength gel accident.
He smiled widely and said, "Hello girls, who's ready to fight for their lives!?"

Chapter End Notes

Author Notes:
Hello again, or for any potential new readers, hello for the first time. I hope anyone who read this opening chapter for this new story arc enjoyed it :)

I would like to thank Person With Many Aliases for being an awesome and supportive beta reader, and also to extend my thanks to Darth Artemis for showing me that the Knights Errant has a TV Tropes page, (I had a joyful freak out over that) and similarly would like to thank HK87 for creating the tropes page. It was thanks to such support that I was able to get back into the swing of things and focus hard on writing this sequel and I hope everyone enjoys what is to come, and if you have any feedback, please feel free to leave any questions comments or critique and I will do my very best to get back to you.
Their contractor was... not what anyone expected.

He was a tall waspish figure, with wild green hair and tiny spectacles. He had a silver and green thermos strapped to the side of his long brown coat, that was layered with dozens of pockets, all stuffed full of equipment. He smiled widely and said, "Hello girls, whose ready to fight for their lives!?"

"Uh, um, you're Doctor Oobleck?" Weiss stammered.

She barely got a nod from their contractor before he opened his mouth to speak again, only for Oobleck to be interrupted by one of the elders clearing their throat.

He straightened up instantly and blurred back to his original position, sitting on a woven brown rug, where-upon he gestured for them to join him. "Come, come, sit! Tradition must be followed here young Huntresses!"

The four Huntresses quickly dropped down onto their own mats next to their contractor and across from the elders. Sitting before them were small ceramic plates with a slight curve to them.

The central elder, an older woman with a tuft of grey hair showing from beneath her hood leaned forward. She began smoothly ladling out a small serving of the steaming liquid into each of the saucers, three before the elders, five before the arranged Hunters.

"We welcome you Huntresses as the friends of a friend, please, drink," instructed the thickly bearded elder to the right.

Weiss was surprised by how easily Blake and Yang took to drinking from the saucers, and was especially impressed that Blake managed to avoid showing her face to their contractor while drinking. Ruby had the expected difficulties with some of the tea dripping onto her cheeks, forcing her to wipe the tea off with her sleeve. Weiss herself quickly yanked pulled up Yang's scarf and downed her own as quickly as possible, the strong minty liquid flooding her senses and clearing her sinesses.

Following Oobleck and the elders lead Weiss and her team placed the saucers on the mats before them and Weiss offered a quick bow. "Thank you for welcoming us into your home," she said. A quick glance from the corners of her eyes showed her fellow Huntresses were following suit and that Oobleck was smiling.

Rising back up Weiss saw that the elders grave expressions hadn't lifted however they did nod to her which was acknowledgement if nothing else.

"We of the Meral Clan are happy to host you Huntresses, for the day," the furthest left elder said, he looked to be the youngest with a wispy goatee that still had some light blue mixed with the grey. "In that time please feel free to avail yourselves to our hospitality, provided you do not bring disharmony into our midst."

"After that first day however,if you wish to stay you must contribute," added the bearded elder.
"I assure you we will do all in our power to respect your people's ways and heed the rules of our kindly hosts," Weiss answered politely. Inwardly she preened as she felt her teams sending her appreciative glances. 'I guess all those lessons on etiquette were worth something after all,' She thought happily.

The three elders shared a glance and the central woman then spoke up again. "We are loathed to be poor hosts but what comes next is both an instruction and a warning," she said gravely. "If your intent is to climb the mountain South-West of here then we ask that you make no attempt to return to our camp. Furthermore we, strongly," She added firmly, looking to Oobleck, "recommend not climbing it at all."

Weiss glanced at Oobleck but the man merely met the elders halfhearted glare with a nod.

"Sorry," Blake said, raising her hand. "But can I ask what it is about the mountain that is so dangerous, Vil wasn't able to tell us much," she added quickly.

"We apologise if Vil seemed standoffish with you Huntresses," the younger elder said. "He is a young warrior and such matters are best left to discussion with elders and lore keepers such as ourselves."

The trio of elder glanced at one another uncomfortably before the bearded one spoke up. "As matters stand though... We are confident Doctor Oobleck will be able to inform you of the specific dangers. For us, it is simply a matter of experience, our ancestors suffered a great tragedy there and now that land is a natural lure for the Grim. Their spirits draw the monsters away from the low lands where we live our lives peacefully. Whatever your decision we wish you good luck on your journey Huntresses, Doctor."

With that the three elders bowed, quickly rose to their feet and shuffled out of the tent, sealing the flap behind them as they left.

"Well," Yang muttered, "That was awkward."

"I suppose it must seem that way," Oobleck said, the mans speed and energy not having been dampened int he slightest as he poured himself another saucer of tea. "The somewhat round about manner of their speech, along with the traditions and ritual used by the Meral clan could fill several documentaries. The same is true for all wanderers really," he said, gulping the steaming beverage down. "Whatever the case you handled yourselves very respectfully, I can see why you were recommended to me. Provided we survive and don't try to come back this way immediately I imagine they'll be much warmer the next time you meet them!"

Weiss preened a little as the compliment, particularly when Ruby added a whispered "Yeah, you were awesome!" and Blake nodded to her appreciatively.

"That's encouraging," Yang chuckled as she swirled her saucer of tea, "So I guess you know Junior then?"

Oobleck's head blurred as he shook his head, how the man's glasses stayed on Weiss would never know. "I am not particularly acquainted with that fellow myself, though I did need to go through him to make contact with you. In fact it was Headmaster Ozpin that recommended your services to me miss Xiao Long," he said without missing a beat.

A knowing smile spread on his face as he nodded towards Weiss and Blake and said, "And yes Miss Rose the same goes for the rest of you. Miss Belladonna and Miss Schnee as well, there's no need for the veils here you two. Unless you like them I suppose," he added as an afterthought.
"Well that was a waste of a disguise wasn't it?" Weiss huffed as she dragged her hood down.

"The idea was sound!" Ruby insisted.

"So can I have my scarf back?" Yang asked as she casually slid just a little ways in front of Blake who continued to look upon Oobleck with some suspicion.

"I'll understand perfectly well if you don't wish to confirm my information Miss Belladonna but I must ask, are you all still willing to join me on this mission?" Oobleck asked, the frantic, chirpy energy fading from his tone and expression to be replaced by something crisper and more focused.

All four of them briefly glanced at one another, Ruby nodded first, followed by Yang, then Weiss, and finally, Blake. "We were going to have to do something like this at some point," the Faunus said.

"Marvellous!" Oobleck cheered. "I suppose now its time to begin the true mission briefing before we set off then!"

That brought Ruby to the forefront as she said, "Um, aren't you kind of, well," she bit her lip, "happy for a Search and Rescue emission?"

"Hm?" Oobleck blinked. "Oh yes, well you see due to the nature of this mission search and rescue was... applicable," he said, waving his hand. "But it was perhaps, one could could say, stretching the truth somewhat. My request to help me scout the mountains and to locate a particular individual are true but I am confident they are in fact fine. What I really need are extra sets of hands and eyes, especially if there are any surprises waiting for us. After all, we will be searching for," he added solemnly and shaking his head, "One of Remnant's greatest historical tragedies and such places rarely give up their secrets easily."

"We're going to need you to elaborate on all of that, quickly," Blake deadpanned.

"Of course, of course!" Oobleck said, waving his hands. "You see I am not merely a lecturer at Beacon Academy, but an archaeologist," he grinned, "I didn't get this doctorate for my first aid skills after all."

"Woah-woah-woah!" Yang said, waving her arms and calling for a pause, "Hold on. You're Beacon?" She stressed, "Why aren't you, I dunno, stealing half the school for some sort of glorified class trip?"

"I'm... uh... working semi-independently, here. Private project, you could say! Just like you!" Oobleck said.

"... Are we even getting paid for going to what you just called "Remnant's Greatest Historical Tragedy?" Blake asked slowly.

Oobleck scoffed and said, "Don't be ridiculous! You wouldn't be here if I didn't pay your job director the front deposit?"

'Oh god, is that what he calls himself now?' Yang despaired to herself.

"There is simply no way a Professor could possibly arrange this with just his own salary, not with the pay you promised us," Weiss added.

That brought a chuckle to Yang's lips, "So where are you getting this from? Salami-slicing the tuition fees?"
"I'm not that heartless!" Oobleck said, clutching his heart dramatically. "I might just have been a little bit clever with Beacon's finances! I successfully filed a grant to expand Beacon's library! The first month's instalment alone was enough to cover half of this trip's budget!"

"...And the other half?" Weiss asked.

"...And-the-cafeteria-might-only-be-serving-lasagna-to-students-for-a-month-straight-but-it's-for-a-good-cause! History!"

"...Wow," Ruby murmured.

"Wow," Yang said.

"Wow," Weiss finished.

"...Right-then-lets-find-some-treasure-shall-we-I-believe-my-contract-stipulates-a-15-percent-bonus-discovery-fee! Tut-tut my bodyguards!"

"...Wow. And they say I'm evil," Blake muttered as she rolled her eyes.

"So wait, we're not looking for anyone?" Ruby asked confusedly.

"Hm?" Oobleck hummed, looking at the smallest Huntress quizzically before snapping his fingers in realisation. "Oh we are, I commissioned a fellow named Cooper, he's a, well he's not a Hunter or an archaeologist, but with all the time he spends in the wilds he's like one, but they're more of an independent contractor. A Treasure Hunter really."

Oobleck waved his hands animatedly, "Regardless, he has found me dozens of fascinating relics in past and his message said he would be waiting up in the mountain for me. Thus we are technically searching for him, and in a sense we could be seen as rescuing him as well, if from a danger that has not yet presented itself. Now come, come, I can explain the rest on the way, we mustn't bother our hosts for too long, and daylights burning!"

Without waiting a second Oobleck blurred to his feet and shot out of the tent. The Huntresses all stared at one another for a moment, a mix of uncertainty and general confusion running through them.

"Well, he seems... fun," Ruby said uncertainly.

Oobleck blurred back into the tent, feet tapping as he pointed towards his watch, "Expedience is prized amongst Huntresses young ladies."

"We're coming!" Ruby shouted, exploding into rose petals as she chased after their contractor.

"Aw dammit, slow down some of us have led feet!" Yang called after them as she dashed out of the tent, Blake and Weiss hot on her heels.

"Well, this promises to be an... interesting mission," Weiss said as they ran after the trail of rose petals.

Yang snorted at that while Blake remained silent, her amber eyes focused squarely on the mountain that rose high into the clouds before them.
As always a special thanks to my beta reader Person With Many Aliases for their help with this chapter, including contributing a scene which helped cement this story idea to me when we were planning it all out. I sincerely hope it was an enjoyable read, and if there are any questions, comments or critique please feel free to offer them.

While not spending as much time with them as planned I ended up liking the Meral Clan and the world/culture building I got to do in some of these segment; I took a lot of inspiration for their behaviour from 'Travels Throughout Azeroth and Outland's' Tauren society, specifically the Feralas Tribes. If you're every interested in a good fantasy story with great world building i highly recommend that story even if you're not a fan of Warcraft.
Raucous Ruins Chapter 3: Horrible Histories

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even once Oobleck had been reminded that not everyone in their team had a speed Semblance to keep up with him the doctors pace was by no means a forgiving one. First they'd needed to spend half an hour leaping through the trees, bouncing and rebounding off the occasional large stone or towering trees. This was to reduce signs of their presence to any Grim that might be seeking the Meral Camp.

They could only run free once breaking free of the suffocating forest. The claustrophobic jungle becoming sparser as they neared the foot of the mountain where giant, jagged, stones pointed up from the earth.

Of course having more space to run and some distance from the camp just meant Oobleck wanted them to move faster. The man would only occasionally stop to observe some random plant or stone he found intriguing. Other times if something caught his eye he'd simply point them forward then shoot off without another word, only to appear again a few minutes later already ahead of them muttering about samples and 'signs'.

Suffice to say when the quartet fell on their first band of Grimm, a nasty looking band of Ursa, they made it a point to vent their irritation on the beasts.

"Quite a good show indeed!" Oobleck had commended, lowering his glasses to look over the smoking ruin that had once been a verdant flowerbed. "Perhaps just a little too noisy though," he added, eyes twinkling in amusement as a deep roar rumbled in the air and through the ground.

"Below!" Blake shouted.

At the last moment they all hurled themselves backwards or into the air. They were just in time to see a scaly black bottomed and white topped maw explode from the ground below. The massive Grim let out a baleful screech as it thrashed in the open air, its elongated neck twisting as it sought out its erstwhile prey.

The fiery blasts Yang had used to propel herself up collided with the Grimm but the crackling flames simply bounced off its hide.

From up above Weiss drew back her blade and appearing with a lyrical hum one of her Glyphs was called into existence before her and Weiss and thrust Myrtenaster through it, unleashing a hail of icy daggers towards the Grimm's mouth.

The sparkling icy daggers shot straight down and the Grimm hurled its head back and wailed as they cut into its open maw.

"Its trying to escape!" Oobleck barked.

Blake blurred forward and lashed out with Gambol Shroud. The thick black material, suffused with the power of her soul wrapped around the base of the Grim's head as it tried to dart back down its hole.
"Ah!" Blake cried as the Grimm used its greater leverage to begin pulling her forward.

"Blake!" They all seemed to cry.

Ruby blurred towards the hole and began firing down at the retreating beast.

Unseen by his companions Oobleck drove the tip of his weapon into the ground at a sharp angle and squeezed down on the trigger, a smirk spreading across his lips.

Weiss summoned a Glyph to anchor Blake to the ground while Yang rocketed herself to her friends side, grasping the ribbon she joined the tug of war between Huntress and Grimm.

A vicious roaring sound echoed from the Grim's hole and Ruby shot backwards as the Grimm exploded upwards. Fire trailed after the creature, clinging to its thick swishing tail and stumpy lizard legs. Blake and Yang practically roared as they swung the Grim into the open air where it spiralled and thrashed wildly only to be caught in another one of Weiss's Glyphs.

"Fire!" Ruby shouted, just as Oobleck ordered, "Open fire!"

A cascade of bullets and flames shot towards the Grim in a burning maelstrom that crashed against its thrashing form. One last vicious shriek cut through the air before Weiss's Glyph faded and the hulking Grimm dropped to the ground, its body vanishing entirely moments before it struck the earth.

Eyes were wide as the Huntresses glanced around their surrounding. The steep incline of the mountain before them, the thick forest behind them with rocks, vines and trees spread all around them. After another moment of tension they all let out a shared sigh of relief.

"Wooh, been awhile since a Grimm managed to get the jump on us like that!" Yang said, shaking her wild mane of hair.

"At least I pulled back Gambol Shroud in time," Blake added as she sheathed her weapon, eyes still trailing their surroundings.

"Your first experience with a Creep I take it?" Oobleck asked. The mans posture was straight and his hands were clasped behind his back, with his weapon already having been folded back into its thermos form and reattached to his jacket.

"Of course not," Weiss snapped as she scanned Myrtenaster's Dust containers. 'Still eighty percent full, I can wait until we make camp before refilling,' She thought.

"Yeah we just never saw one that big before, and usually they're more, 'Rar I'm gonna jump out and bite you!' not, "Ruby waved her free hand lazily, "'Boom, I'm here to gobble you up!'"

"Indeed," Oobleck said, taking a sip from his thermos. "Many of the Grimm in these mountains, or at least the ones that could pose a danger on their own, fall into the category of stealth hunters you see."

"I think I can see why the Meral Clan avoids it," Weiss said.

"Quite so, these mountains have a reputation for swallowing Travellers up alive. Though there are
obviously other environmental hazards as well," Oobleck added quickly.

"But no spirits?" Yang asked, a single raised eyebrow was directed at the Doctor.

"Not that I am aware of!" Oobleck said, throwing a single hand forward as if telling the conversation to 'halt'. "However I would be remiss to rule anything out, our world is old and we are all but children trying to understand the millennia of mysteries its left for us. With that in mind, let us continue, we can make start scouting once we're half a mile in and make camp once it hits the evening!"

Once they set off again, at a thankfully less hectic pace than before, with the five Hunters merely jogging their way up the steep brown slopes of the mountain, Blake spoke. "From the way you spoke it sounds like you've been here before, doctor."

Throwing his head back, likely taking another swig of his thermos Oobleck chortled, "Indeed I have Miss Belladonna! Only sporadically though and I've never been able to stay long!"

"So who are we looking for anyway, I mean you said ruins but I can't see anything!" Ruby asked as she jogged at Oobleck's side. Unsurprisingly she was the only one who didn't have to make real effort to keep up with the senior Hunters 'speed-walking'.

"Ah yes I suppose we have time now!" Oobleck cheered, "Wonderful to see such curiosity in the youth of today. You see Miss Rose our mission is twofold," he said, holding up a single digit. "Firstly we must locate one Mr Cooper, the Treasure Hunter who called me here in the first place."

Oobleck hopped into the air and soared over a large stone outcropping and was followed by the four Huntresses. The stone beneath their feet was flatter than the mountains slope and had clearly been altered by human or Faunus hands. It was surprisingly large, grass covered the flattened rock and the feeble remnants of habitation could be seen in worn carving upon the cliff face and the stone made divisions in the grass.

"This was once a small farming settlement," Oobleck said, his tone hushed but his words still quick. "The farmers would have lived within the cave you see before you," he said, gesturing towards the seemingly empty back abyss.

"Boartusk, dodge!" Blake shouted.

The Huntresses shot to the sides of the cave and a moment later a white and black spinning blur exploded out of the cave only to hurl itself off the mountain and go crashing into the lands below. A lonely round of sniper fire from Ruby pursued the Grimm, cracking its armour and sending it running deeper into the woods.

"Fear not, for anyone who might be down there. The Boartusk was juvenile at best, its companions deeper in the cave may be wiser but we can ignore them provided they don't attack," Oobleck said.

Ruby kicked the grass and let out a disappointed sigh, "I hate having to conserve ammo."

"So you were saying Doctor?" Weiss said as they looked around the neatly divided fields of overgrown grass and... turnips?

"Ah yes of course, thank you Miss Schnee. You see this land has been a curiosity to many scholars for several centuries. The reason!?” He asked, suddenly spinning around to look directly at Yang
who blinked owlishly at the man.

"Was?" She asked.

Oobleck threw back his head and spun across the fields his arms open wide. "Legends, histories and mythologies all make reference to the lost burgeoning City State of Morius that is allegedly hidden somewhere upon these mountains!" He cried.

"We're going to find a lost city, oh so cool!" Ruby cheered.

Coming to a stop Oobleck gave them all a level look and said, "Indeed it is Miss Rose, wonderful to see such enthusiasm for history from one so young! Now, come, come, we must continue searching. I know for a fact there are several former farmsteads scattered throughout these slopes. It is one one of these that we are likely to find Cooper waiting for us with his findings."

Taking a more sedate pace the five of them continued their trek up the mountain. Occasional signs such as an old fading path or a carving could be spied littering the slopes.

For her part Yang was only half paying attention to Oobleck's rambling. They wouldn't even begin the real search until they made camp and established a wide area grid pattern so it was easy for her to fall behind and enjoy the fresh air. This decision also conveniently let her fall in next to Blake who was 'guarding the rear' and thus dragging behind them all. With Weiss and Ruby quizzing Oobleck now's a good a time as any I guess,' Yang thought.

"So," Yang started chirpily, swinging her arms out to try and pass some of her energy onto Blake, "Wanna talk?"

"I'm fine," Blake said, not meeting her eyes.

"You know, my uncle always told me never to believe anyone who said they were' fine',' Yang said, with finger-quotes around the last word. "But hey, I have an idea. How about you just forget that I'm here, say whatever's on your mind. Then I'll pop," she clapped her hands, "back into existence, say some random stuff that obviously has nothing to do with what you were talking about, and if you don't like it you can tell me when to shut up, K?"

Blake merely rolled her eyes at that and let out a low derisive snort. But Yang recognised the girls tone, and her suspicious were proven right a moment later when Blake shrugged her shoulders causing her dark cloak to ripple. Quietly she said, "Its the mission, Morius is... I, all Faunus have a history with that city."

"Oh," Yang murmured as she tried to catch Blake's eyes while her friend tied to look anywhere but.

"I guess its pretty messed up then?" Yang ventured.

"Hmph, you could say that..." Blake sighed, "If the stories are true, Morius would have been the first kingdom of Faunus in recorded history... Before it was destroyed."

'Ooh shit,' Yang thought, clasping Blake's shoulder, only idly noticing how the girls feline ears were twitching under her hood in response to Oobleck speaking animatedly up ahead of them.

As they followed one of the worn down, windy and slightly moss covered paths that Oobleck insisted would have once been much larger Weiss spoke. "Doctor, I think I have good reason to
consider myself scholarly and I've never heard of a city, or even an attempted one named Morius. And if it was so large wouldn't its ruins be visible when flying over it, such as with the Emerald Forests?"

"Ah, good questions Miss Schnee," Oobleck enthused as he led them through another small patch of greenery that Weiss guessed showed some signs of ancient habitation.

"Your argument regarding a birds eye view so to speak is well reasoned however it is entirely possible that only the foundations still remain. If they are as overgrown as these small outposts then it would be all too easy for them to be missed." Chuckling Oobleck said, "An old saying amongst Hunters and soldiers is that aerial scouts never know how it is on the ground, to coin a phrase."

Oobleck held his arms out wide as though he was giving a lecture and continued. "To many Morius is at best as historical fiction or an exaggeration, while a few more sympathetic minds believe Morius could have one developed into a fifth kingdom that might have survived to the modern day. The reason for this debate however is due to politics," For the first time since Weiss had met the man Oobleck's cheer not only faltered but was replaced with something like disgust.

"Growing up in Atlas I sympathise professor," she said.

"Ah my apologies Miss Schnee, Miss Rose, it does not do a scholar well to let personal feeling affect one's view on a matter but it is difficult at times," he said, rubbing his neck.

Blake's words never rose above a tight whisper, as though she was afraid of being overheard, but Yang was listening with baited breath.

"Morus was founded by slaves and 'Wild Faunus' who'd escaped or been passed over for enslavement a few centuries ago. There was a rebellion in a mining colony and the Faunus fled, destroying several more mines and picking up wandering clans as they escaped their pursuers," Blake said.

Even with her face covered by the white scarf Yang could practically see Blake grinding her teeth as her hands clenched, veins throbbing in her arms.

"Blake," Yang whispered, rubbing the girls shoulder only to be shaken off as Blake continued her tale.

"You see girls," Oobleck said, glancing over his shoulder. "It never would do for the powers of the day to admit that Faunus could build a civilisation. The 'best' they said, that a Faunus could accomplish were small tribes without even simple tools. Preposterous!" he added.

Weiss and Ruby both found themselves glancing back at Blake whom was quietly chatting with Yang.

"While a 'justification'," Oobleck said in finger-quotes, "has not always been necessary for the evils in people's hearts it often helps. In this case those who endorsed the enslavement of Faunus claimed that the Faunus needed guidance and to be controlled. For their own good of course," he added satirically.
"And I suppose Morius was a threat to this ideology?" Weiss suggested.

"Indeed, not just Morius but any Faunus village that ran interdependently of humans. One can still see the lingering influence of this prejudice today even!" Oobleck said, taking a deep swig of what Weiss could only assume was coffee.

"Have you ever read anything by Mersela Tan?" he asked, the man's light and energetic tone reappearing.

Sadly both girls could only shake their heads in response to his query.

"Tragic, well, I highly recommend her work, she is an author of both fiction and medicine. Recently when a book she wrote was nominated for an award a critic claimed that she had no right to the award as "Without human guidance Faunus would never have been able to learn to build or write as we do"." Oobleck shook his head in annoyance. "While Morius's case is obviously more extreme similar events happened historically as well," he said, only stopping for a moment to trace his fingers along a slight engraving upon the cliff face next to them, murmuring quietly to himself.

Blake practically spat as she spoke, "When Faunus villages were found humans claimed that they had "stolen" them from humans. This let them imprison us and spread the idea of Faunus as mere animals, too savage to be trusted without chains. Even today Yang Faunus villages or old ruins barely ever get attributed to Faunus builders. Even slaves worked to their deaths barely get a mention," Blake scoffed. "Instead they use terms like 'labourers' ignoring species and obscuring the truth."

"I see," Yang muttered, kicking an offending stone off the mountain and down towards the now blurring forest below them. "I guess that's why Faunus barely came up in history class... Say, Blake, do you want to like, share your historical knowledge with me?" Yang said, hoping to bring Blake from her mire of frustration and anger.

Surprisingly Blake laughed. "Hah, I couldn't tell you much, what did Tuckson say? Ah that's right, 'we're historians working without texts, all we have is guesswork, patterns and the stories of our dying generations'."

"I'm sorry," Yang whispered.

"Why are you apologising? You didn't do anything," Blake said.

"I know, but, I'm sorry for well, the whole situation I guess, its so fucked up," Yang said, slamming her fists together and feeling her Aura flare as the heat coiled out from her chest and through her body, causing heat to radiate from her skin like a fire.

"It is, but still, thanks for trying to cheer me up with that. Who knows, there might be a few stories I could tell you," Blake said, nudging the blonde.

"Hey I like that idea, normally I'm the one with the stories its time we shifted things up a bit, now how about a hug?" Yang said, holding her arms out.

"I'm good, thanks," Blake said, a faint wispy chuckle on her lips.

"Aw come on, this is a special offer you know," Yang said, grinning at the smaller girl.
"Your hugs can't fix everything Yang, also you give them out to everyone," Blake countered.

"Bah, unbeliever," Yang said, "my hugs can fix your problems, my hugs are made of sunshine and lollipops!"

Blake snorted and finally let out a quick chortle of laughter before playfully batting Yang's arms and said, "You're absurd."

"Guys, hurry up, you're falling behind!" Ruby yelled.

Only now did it occur to the duo just how much higher Ruby and the others had gotten than them.

"Ah crap, guess we're jumping the rest of the way?" Yang asked, Ember Celica whirring as she readied to launch herself up a few steps.

"Looks like," Blake said, un-holstering Gambol Shroud. "Race you to the top."

Yang slammed her fists together and felt a pulse of energy rush through her body, "Heh, you're on!"

Chapter End Notes

Here are at the next instalment of Raucous Ruins, thanks to everyone for the feedback so far and as always my thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases on SB for their help beta reading this story, I hope you all enjoyed it and please feel free to leave a comment, question or critique, I'm very curious as to people's thoughts on how the delivery of exposition was handled, the world building and characters.

I based a lot of the historical and modern issues faced by Faunus on historical and modern day examples of racism, stuff like old archaeologists claiming ancient castles found in Africa "Must" have been built by some white civilisation that was no longer present, or "maybe" China, is an example. Similarly the reference to a writer being insulted by a, "Critic", with discriminatory language and ideas was based on something that happened more recently. Suffice to say doing research for this aspect of the story was very depressing and I hope it didn't come across as disrespectful.
Hiking did not agree with Weiss, and not just because she'd had to empty pebbles out of her boots more than three times in a day. 'Its also just boring!' She thought to herself. It was such a 'Ruby' thing to think but once the more dramatic histories of the mountain and the alleged Morius had been cleared up, well... Oobleck had mostly confined himself to short barely comprehensible statements as he observed scuff marks on rocks.

It had gotten so boring as they marched up the mountain, always on the look out for a man in brown, with blonde hair, as Oobleck described had described his erstwhile employee, Ruby had even managed to rope Weiss into a game of 'I spy'. 'Of course you can only find new words for 'rocks' so many times before it gets dull,' Weiss thought.

To say she was grateful to be making camp would be an understatement. Her spirits further buoyed by the promise of a more structured and well ordered search in the morning over and endless slog up samey mountain paths. They'd stopped in perhaps the largest patch of greenery they'd seen on the mountain so far. One large enough that it could have easily fit thirty Zwei's. 'Oh my gosh that is adorable,' Weiss thought, picturing a farm filled with nothing but adorable corgis.

She was pulled from her thoughts at the sound of the small fire she was tending to crackling. Shaking her head Weiss threw another stack of kindling on and returned to taking in her surroundings. There wasn't much else to say about the small patch of life on the mountain side, save that it even had some trees growing on it, trees with rather sour tasting fruit, but she wasn't going to complain about free food... Well, not much, anymore.

Blake and Yang had already set out bed rolls, Ruby and Oobleck had gathered twigs and torn up roots for kindling. 'We're still going to need to use some Burn Dust to draw it out if we want a solid meal,' Weiss mused as she prodded the small soon to be fire. The only reason she'd been granted a reprieve from work was because Weiss had volunteered for an extra long night shift along with Blake.

Thus, with little else to do, she used her time to take in more of her surroundings. I suppose an archaeologist would find a lot about the stone patterns fascinating,' She mused. There was an outline on the ground that might have been the foundation for a small cottage mostly hidden by some savage looking bushes, though she could still see some lingering masonry scattered about as well. What stood out the most to her were the mostly intact engraving along the cave face that showed dozens of neatly carved, but slightly curved lines. Each one had a slight interruption signified by a circle that-

"Ah fascinating, this must have been an ancient calendar for keeping track of crop management via the moon cycles!" Oobleck cheered.

'I was going to say that!' Weiss huffed silently.

Oobleck continued tracing his hands along the intricate but weathered patterns murmuring excitedly to himself. "Perhaps a guide as well, or even perhaps, no it couldn't have just been a calendar there's too much unrelated information. They wouldn't fill the space with meaningless squiggles so, hm, yes it could indeed be a-"
"Map?" Blake cut in, the Faunus having been watching the man’s study with some interest since they started setting up camp.

Oobleck spun around, eyes wide and Blake lazily pushed herself off from the tree she’d been leaning against. Despite herself Weiss couldn’t help but liken Blake’s confident swagger to that of a cat’s strut.

"I’m just guessing but I think it’s a layered message," Blake said as she joined Oobleck at the wall and began tracing lines. "The moon cycles play a part but they could just as easily be for a watch schedule, or to signify when a delivery needs to be made."

"Yes, yes," Oobleck enthused, nodding his head rapidly. "Each line would have significance but it’s about connecting the correct symbol to the correct line and knowing when to jump from one to the next!"

"So..." Yang said, pulling her head out of the duffel bag to reveal cooking implements. "Anyone want to explain what that means to those of us who must have missed the history class on coded messages?"

"It does sound rather interesting, I didn’t know you studied this sort of thing Blake," Weiss added.

"I haven’t really," Blake said shortly, "But layered messages are still used in some places even today."

"Indeed they are, sadly this matter is not covered particularly well in school unless there is some overt historically significant story, such as a battle depending on a message getting through or some such," Oobleck said. "Miss Belladonna, would you care to explain the basics?"

Rolling her eyes a little at her long since ruined cover Blake tapped her knuckles lightly against the carved stone face. "Layered messages come in lots of forms but they’re all a means of secretly communicating, usually several instructions at once," she said.

Turning to face them Blake held up her hands and spoke, "Take a piece of paper for example and say, put three letters in three different parts of the page, all far apart. It’s useless right? No one knows what it means. But then," Blake continued, sliding one of her hands in front of the other, "place a second page on top of the first with three more letters in different spots. Then you do it again and again until you get the full message. That’s one very basic example. This map is... more complicated though and relies on... I think they’re called pictographs?"

"Brilliantly said Miss Belladonna!" Oobleck cheered. "And you are one hundred percent correct, many ancient cultures disliked leaving their home and territories bare. Symbols can mean anything from an attempt to ward off the Grim, to instructions, to even telling a story or just labelling a location. This was especially useful during period where literacy was not as common as it is now," he added.

"Miss Belladonna would you be willing to help me try and uncover more of this map’s secrets? I feel it may hurry our search along and could prove a most fascinating exercise," Oobleck asked.

Blake stayed frozen for a moment, eyes locking on the man before shooting to her teammates then back. Finally she shrugged, "Sure, I can try anyway."

"Marvellous!" Oobleck cheered.

With that said and done matters quickly became simple in the camp as the night pressed on, Blake and Oobleck taking breaks to eat and trade theories with their fellows Hunters.
Hours later, after the moon had risen to its zenith to replace the absent sun, Weiss sat alone on the outskirts of the darkened camp overlooking the mountain below. Only light from the Glyph cradled between her hands shone. Every now and again Weiss would case her gaze out across the mountain in search of the telltale sign of red eyes and white masks but she found nothing. The seismograph on her Scroll showed a similar lack of activity since the last Creep had tried to burrow up under them and gotten incinerated by Oobleck before it could even rise up and ruin their meal.

Weiss's face was a mask of strained concentration as she scowled at the Glyph in her hands. Eight elegantly curved arrows in pairs of two sat on the outside of the shining Glyph. Deeper in were two sets of broken lines that created the outline of a circle. Tiny stylistic crowns ran along the circles edges, and snowflakes sat beneath them. Below them, four more broken lines, imperfectly aligned, unsymmetrical and sloppy. Weiss grit her teeth and the Glyph began to speed up. Half a dozen points sat within the smaller second circle and four great swords jutted out from the centre and stretched out across the rest of the Glyphs.

'It's not in line, its not working, its just, arg!' The sharp and angry humming rose to a new crescendo and then the Glyph shattered into sparkling silver lights and faded from sight.

'Dammit,' Weiss inwardly cursed as she let out a shallow breath and cast a baleful gaze across the dark mountain surface before glancing back to the camp some metres back. 'At least I didn't wake anyone... At least then I'm not a nuisance as well as a failure...' She thought scornfully.

Weiss's eyes were drawn again to her faintly glowing Scroll on the ground next to her. They were high up in the mountains, higher than they'd been with Yang the last time they tried to get a signal, and this time, Weiss had gotten a message.

'Father is furious, he wants you found and he wants you home, now.'

It was not the most... encouraging opening line for the young Huntress to see. Not that she'd expected anything else but- 'But if he expected me to just come crawling back he's wrong! If he really wanted me back he should have come himself, not sent some toadies,' Weiss thought.

Her fathers ire was one thing, Winter's response though... that was another. Though in truth Weiss wasn't sure what she should have expected.

'I will respect your right to find your own path Weiss, even if I'd prefer your decision to be less dangerous than living outside the walls at your level. However I can't be responsible for hiding or protecting you, or those with you should you be discovered.'

Only the brief 'I love you' at the end had managed to offset Weiss's disappointment. 'I shouldn't be disappointed, I can't just expect Winter to hear about dad and just make everything better. Besides I'm doing fine, and if- when we get back to one of the Kingdom I'll... I'll deal with father then. Somehow,' Weiss thought. Even she was disappointed by how weak her mental voice sounded.

'I can't just keep relying on other people. I'm meant to be a Huntress, brave, independent, smart and strong enough to fix my own problems!' Weiss thought. It was what had brought upon her sudden desire to practise summoning again, the one Glyph skill she'd truly neglected and the one she struggled with most. 'But what if Yang's not there to take a hit, or Ruby and Blake can't cover me?'

What if they needed Weiss to be more than she was and she simply wasn't enough? What if they
left her and Weiss couldn't stand alone?

A rustling in the grass behind her snapped Weiss from her daze. Sword in hand and a call to arms on her lips Weiss shot around and squeaked, "Doctor Oobleck?!

"Hm?" he said, glancing at her. "Oh good night Miss Schnee, how are you?" he asked as he quietly slipped out of the camp Scroll in hand.

Weiss sheathed her blade and ran her hands down her jacket and skirt to smooth them out before remembering the wrinkles would never go away. "Oh, fine, just keeping watch... Shouldn't you be sleeping?"

"Bah, I had a solid hour or two, that's more than enough!" How Oobleck could yell and whisper at the same time and with such never ending enthusiasm Weiss would never know. 'Still it proves Ruby isn't the only one who can be relentlessly chipper, now if only she could master the 'quiet' yelling thing we'd all be fine,' Weiss mused. "I see," she said out loud, "So what were you planning on doing?"

"Oh merely going over and organising some of the notes I've made on this trip, quite fascinating really," He said. Without prompting he showed her his Scroll and quickly dragged his finger down the touch screen. In an instant the page went from one, to ninety seven.

"That is, quite impressive Doctor, all of that is just from this trip?" Weiss asked.

"Oh indeed, I have several more journals covering my interest in the Lost City of Morius, but this is the most recent one. It shall be quite a joy to be able to compare what I knew in the past to what I've learnt today, to what I learn in the future," Oobleck said. The green haired doctor casually dropped down on the ground and dangled his legs of the edge of the stone outcropping.

"You certainly are passionate about your work," Weiss said for lack of something constructive to say. 'Dammit, every time you're out of words you either snap or start buttering people up,' She thought.

"Ah thank you, history has long since been a great love of mine, there is so much we can learn from it, of our roots, our accomplishments and our failures," he said, voice growing tighter at the last word.

"Is that what you want to do here Doctor, learn about why Morius fell?" Weiss asked, her hand waved lazily into the air, "I'd have thought there were all sorts of reasons why it wouldn't work. I mean, the lack of natural barriers and food sources alone."

"Indeed, in fact part of my curiosity comes from wanting to see how a city lacking the defences the four Kingdoms possess could have been built at all, let alone how it survived long enough to be deemed a threat by the powers of the day" Oobleck said. Even as he spoke the man's fingers danced across his Scroll as he worked. "Other kingdoms have survived outside before of course, but tragically none have lasted to the modern day," he said with a shake of his head. "Still," Oobleck continued, voice firmer and more upbeat, "there is always something we can learn from the mistakes past so that we can avoid repeating those failures."

"I see," Weiss looked over the mountain and tried to picture some sort of city cut out of the stone only to find her imagination failing. "Do you think we'll be able to avoid failing again?" She asked, hands ringing together.

"All I know Miss Schnee is that we must try, to learn, and do better," Oobleck said gravely.
Their conversation was interrupted by the beeping of Weiss's Scroll.

"Ah well, I suppose we shall continue this another time," Oobleck said casually.

Snapping up the device Weiss looked to the Doctor and said. "I suppose we will, do you want me to get Blake so you two can discuss more history?"

"Haha, I believe I have picked miss Belladonna's brain enough for one night. Though if she wished to speak with me more I would hardly object," Oobleck added as an afterthought.

"I guess we'll see, good night Doctor," Weiss said.

"Good night Miss Schnee."

The fuzzy world of sleep faded as Blake awoke at Weiss's gentle urging, the girls hand gently jostling Blake's sleepy-limp frame.

"Sorry, but its your... uaahh," Weiss yawned, "turn to take watch."

"Hm? Sure, thanks Weiss," Blake said, rubbing her eyes Blake saw Weiss was only shuffling away. "Something wrong?" She asked.

"No its just," Weiss started, "I'm really glad you're here, with us, and I think we'll all go far no matter what."

Weiss's words were quick and bordered on rambling, though Blake imagined the girl would have taken um-bridge at such an implication. "Hmm," Blake murmured, "thank you Weiss, and for what its worth, I'm glad you're with us as well," Blake said, smiling up at the girl.

Weiss sighed, as if in relief, "Well, we're both glad then, good night!" Weiss said, a little energy coming back to her as she marched to her bedroll.

'Its funny to think of how much she's changed,' Blake mused as she slipped from her bed. Then again, I guess I have to...' Blake thought. She cast her gaze across Yang and Ruby's sleeping forms. Two people, barely comprehensible to the ideologies she'd spent the last five years around, who accepted, welcomed and helped without question. Blake cast off her blanket, she felt warm enough already and she had a job to do. She couldn't let her friends down after all.

'Maybe one day, we'll be able to make everyone see things the way we do,' Blake thought as she began to patrol the camp. Faunus and human, working and living together in harmony, the past not forgotten but instead something they could overcome together.

'Well... It's a nice thought.'

Chapter End Notes

Here we are again, as usual I'd like to thank my beta reader Persons with many Aliases on SB for their help with this story, I hope anyone who read this chapter enjoyed it and if you have any questions queries or comments please don't be shy :)
It was when writing this chapter I actually realised that this story was becoming both longer and more character focused than originally planned, overall I think that's a good thing. However I have realised that maybe I should have squashed chapters 12/ and 3/4 together, they might have been a bit longer than I am comfortable posting but it may have served the pacing better. I guess we'll see how it plays out.

Things will become more plot centric and action packed next chapter regardless.
The morning sun peaking over the distant horizon shone a brilliant orange and the moment Ruby felt it hit her face the Huntresses silver eyes burst open and she greeted the day with a smile. Kicking off her blanket Ruby threw up her arms and stretched into the air until she felt a satisfying pop in her neck, "Ah, good morning everyone!" she cheered.

"Morning sis!" Yang called. Both the blonde and Oobleck were seated around the camp fire, and the faint smell of fried beans and sausages drifted into Ruby's nostrils. "Coffee?" Yang asked, holding up a steaming hot thermos.

"Ooh yes please," Ruby said, rubbing her hands together, she and Yang might have been morning people but a bit of an extra 'pick me up' was always appreciated. "How many sugars do we have left?" Ruby asked, pulling her favourite metal mug from their camping provisions.

"Enough for a few more days," Yang said, returning to watching Oobleck cook.

"Don't take all the hot water," Blake groaned, bleary eyes the Faunus dragged herself from her bed and ambled over to them.

Weiss was in similarly dire straits, opting to drag her bed roll around with her as she slid up to camp fire. "Please don't be so loud, not all of us are morning people."

"Sorry Weiss, here," Ruby said, taking the piping hot mugs from Yang and passing them out to her teammates.

"Yeah cheer up snowbird, if you're cold I can heat ya up!" Yang offered, hair shining as she pumped her fist into the air and the fire below the pan flared more intensely.

"Ooh, warm," Ruby said, as they all leaned in closer.

"Not what I meant but OK," Yang huffed.

Ruby snuggled up to Yang's side and was quickly dragged into an over-shoulder hug by the blonde brawler, "Aw you!" Yang said, rubbing her head.

"Hey stop it, haha!" Ruby playfully punched her sisters offending hand away. "Come one, we need to plan out the mission," Ruby said, and the group quickly fell into planning over breakfast.

Ruby and Yang both knew it was going to be good when Oobleck popped the question, "How do you all feel about fire works?"

That was the moment Ruby decided she really liked Oobleck.

Two blurs shot up and across the mountain vastness, leaving a flurry of rose petals and shining lights behind them. The red-black and white duo came to a screeching halt upon a smooth rocky outcropping.
Ruby let out a frustrated groan as she leaned upon Crescent Rose, "Still nothing."

"Not nothing exactly," Weiss said, flicking out her Scroll and snapping a picture of, what to Ruby just look like weird cuts in the stone and some squiggles. "We found more pictographs and a caved in... house?" Weiss guessed. Tilting her head at the small, neatly cut hole in the mountainside that had been filled in with rubble.

"I know, but we're meant to be looking for this Cooper guy and like, a whole city!" Ruby said, throwing up her arms.

"I do wish this Treasure Hunter had sent Doctor Oobleck more precise coordinates," Weiss said, nodding. "Even if those two had narrowed the search down to this area, its still a lot of ground to cover. But apparently they want to keep this quiet for as long as possible, its all very cloak and dagger."

"Urg, I really don't get why, I mean, OK I get it a bit," Ruby admitted, "But still... I don't think there's a way to break 'Hey there was a city of Faunus but ancient humans ruined it' without making the White Fang angry or upsetting some other jerks."

Weiss planted her hands on her hips and said, "How much of all of that is true is dependant on whether Morius even exists and what it was like at its peak. Though you do have a point," Weiss conceded, staring off the side of the mountain. "Still, we don't know if it was actually destroyed by humans, this isn't exactly the best place for a settlement. Maybe it was abandoned naturally because of the Grimm? Doctor Oobleck did say he believed the Meral Clan to be descendants of the original inhabitants of Morius who escaped its collapse."

At that Ruby just shrugged, all the previous nights talk of trying to kiting Grim using prisoners, sabotage and shadow wars depressed her. 'I mean come on, the worlds full of Grim and people find the time to have wars, what gives!? Shaking her head Ruby spun around and pointed upwards, into the misty reaches of the mountain. "Wanna pick up the search again? We still have another half a mile to cover."

Nodding Weiss called up a Glyph and said, "Yes, lets get going."

"Race you-" Ruby started only for Weiss to launch herself into the air in one massive Glyph empowered leap, "cheater!" Ruby screeched, exploding into a burst of rose petals after her friend.

As they blurred up the mountain again Ruby nearly tripped as she spied something in the distance, almost hidden by the mist and how deeply entrenched into the mountain-side it seemed to be. "Weiss, up there, a forest!" She shouted so the wind wouldn't snatch her words away.

"What, but that's -" Weiss turned her head, "Green..." she continued, stunned.

Without further ado they launched themselves upwards and came to an abrupt halt as a thick tree line burst into view, vines worked their way around ancient trunks as wild bushes crashed against one another and competed against thick overgrown grass for space.

"Woah," Ruby gasped, head spinning on a swivel as she tried to gauge just how big the forest was. 'This is just like the tip, I can't even see how wide it gets before it starts to bend out of sight!'

"Who would have thought a forest could even survive up here," Weiss mused.
"Yeah its so cool, like a secret forest hidden in the mists of the great mountain!" Ruby enthused.

"Yes, and next thing you know fairies will be coming out of the wood work," Weiss chuckled.

"You never know~" Ruby sing-songed as they stepped from the curved mountain slope onto the overgrown but very flat forests edge.

"Its like someone just flattened out a chunk of mountain, like with the farms before but way bigger, how big do ya think it is Weiss?" Ruby asked, bouncing from one foot to the other. "Big enough to have a hidden city?"

"I'll check," Weiss answered, seconds before leaping into the sky and summoning a Glyph out under her feet to hold herself in place for a few moment as she cast her gaze wide before dropping back to the ground.

"Well?" Ruby asked.

"Its... big, I can't even see the other side of it, I saw an old watch stone tower but no other ruins, still it probably bears looking into," Weiss said.

"Woohoo!" Ruby cheered, her high pitched voice echoing across the mountain.

"Please don't do that again," Weiss groaned, taking her hands from her ears.

"Heh, sorry, forgot how much my voice carries," Ruby said, looking at the ground to hide her smile.

Naturally that was when the growling started. Both Huntresses eyes shot towards the forest, weapons drawn, as a hulking Ursar Major burst through the treeline in a shower of shrapnel, its deep demonic roar deafening as it seemed to shake the mountain itself.

"White Rose!" Ruby ordered, exploding towards the charging Grimm. She went low, dragging Crescent Rose after her and into the ground beneath the surprised Ursas paws. The force of her sweep took the ground out from under it and sent the Grim tumbling upside down into the air. Before it could think Ruby spun around, dragging herself to a stop with Crescent Rose into the stone before she opened fire on the beasts underbelly.

In the instant this all took place Weiss conjured up three Glyphs of speed, one beneath her feet and two before her blade. Fire spun in a miniature vortex at Myrtenaster's tip and she drove it through the Ursas neck and into its brain, unleash a blast of fire that exploded its head into miasma before she'd even finished running past the Grim's body.

Both Huntresses were back to back and grinning at the band of smaller, but still above average, Ursi bellowed and charged at them to avenge their majors death. Tapping their weapons together both Huntresses blurred towards their foes.

For a few brief moments the ruined patch of forest was filled with the sound of dying roars and metal singing as it tore through the air. Then, just as fast they'd begun, Ruby and Weiss blurred back to the centre of the clearing the Ursar Major had made in the forest as their foes fell into nothing around them.
"Is it just me or is this getting easier?" Weiss asked.

"Well you know what they say, practise makes perfect!" Ruby cheered.

Pushing through the tight, overgrown forest was a relatively painless process. It seemed little had opted to make a home in the odd place save the few Grim they'd already dealt with. Now it was just extremely hardy, if thin, trees that stretched into the air, thickly overgrown grass and hanging veins.

"Weiss, Weiss I found something!" Ruby called from up ahead.

Hopping over a thorny bush Weiss found Ruby squatting next to a stone carving that was half buried int he ground. It was cracked and layered with moss but still recognisable... If she could tell what it was anyway.

"Is that some sort of totem?" Weiss asked as she squatted at Ruby's side, hands on her knees.

"Yeah looks like it, think we should call in the others?" Ruby asked.

"We haven't found a city yet so probably not, though I imagine Oobleck will appreciate it if we can bring this back to him, in one piece," Weiss added firmly.

"Yeah the finders fee would be nice, though... what is it meant to be?" Ruby asked, tilting her head quizzically as she scratched her cheek.

"I don't know, there's horns, fangs, three sets of ears, but with the face-"

"Ooh its like a chimera!" Ruby announced, announcing her thought to the sky by pointing upwards.

"That would be rather fitting, well, we'll look around a bit more and--. You're gone aren't you?" Weiss asked the empty space where Ruby had been. Sighing Weiss let her head droop, "Of course you are."

"Weiss! I found something else!" Ruby shrieked.

"Ruby if its another totem," Weiss started as she slammed her way through the undergrowth to where she heard Ruby's voice. "Then it can... ca..." She stammered, having torn through a thick mess of oversized bushes Weiss found herself staring at something she had not expected to see.

The forest behind them gave way to an ancient risen stone path that sat a few inches above the overgrown field they stood upon. Crumbling watchtowers overgrown with vines and trees splitting through the stone-work stood against the passage of nature in the distance. Before them stretched small cuboid houses carved from stone or built from bricks. Each one was cemented to the solid foundations of the mountain below and had a steep stair cases leading to the door that explained their small size. Vines and moss grew throughout the damaged streets and atop the houses were small trees and bushes with fruits.

'That's why Aerial scouts never saw this place, it all looked like part of forest!' Weiss realised.

"I guess Oobleck wasn't kidding about Aerial scouts versus ground huh?" Ruby said. While her words were glib Weiss could sense the slight twist of shock to Ruby's usual jocularity.
"Its... big, bigger than any villages we've been too at least," Weiss gasped. She could only just barely see the edge of the streets some distance away and the circular city, town, she couldn't way which, stretched all around her like some sort overgrown maze.

"How much do you think we'll get for finding this?" Ruby asked.

"A lot probably," Weiss said, pulling out her Scroll she continued, "We need to call the others. Fortunately I still have a signa-.

"Ooh, ooh," Ruby enthused.

Before Weiss could react the younger girl had set off one of the flares Oobleck had given them and sent it roaring into the sky. Weiss groaned and let her arms and shoulders sag, "You really are a child, you know that?"

Ruby ignored this and instead grasped Weiss's shoulders and tilted her face skyward, "You'll miss the show!"

Weiss watched in silence as the red firework shot into the sky and then shattered into a thousand glittering red sparks with a loud 'POP!' Red and white glowing sparkles drifted slowly through the air, shining bright and standing out starkly against the grey of the mountain and clouds.

"Pretty!" Ruby whispered.

"I guess this way works too," Weiss conceded. Besides, Ruby was right, it was very pretty.

"I want extra hazard pay, pffttha!" Yang spat, "or a lawyer," the blonde added, her voice momentarily drowning out Oobleck's excited rambling.

Blake kept her dual sets of ears alert even as she dusted herself off. Upon seeing the signal flare bursting in the sky everyone had dropped their own scouting to find Ruby and Weiss. Oobleck however had apparently been faster than they'd given him credit for and in his excitement had literally dragged herself and Yang across the cliff and through forest before depositing them to begin examining over the ruins.

"Fascinating, absolutely fascinating!" Oobleck cheered as he shot around the perimeter of what Blake assumed was Morius. Occasionally the man would dart up a tree or stand on his toes while staring through his Scrolls binocular app.

It was impressive, Blake thought, 'Tough and easy to defend. The half submerged houses with the gardens on top give camouflage and food. They must never have wanted to be found,' Blake mused. She hadn't noticed that she was clenching her fists until Yang clapped her on the shoulder and gave her a sympathetic look.

Shaking her head Blake nodded at the blonde and pushed forward, 'We've seen ruins all over the continent, but as well made as it is, this isn't... Well its no second coming of Vale.' A fact that in some ways made Morius's destruction more brutal and unnecessary but Blake tried to push past that thought, she needed her head in the game if they encountered more Grim.

"So you really think this is the place!?" Ruby asked from atop a tall boulder. The brunette was looking through Crescent Roses scope and into the ruins for the elusive treasure hunter Oobleck.
"Yes, yes almost certainly," Oobleck said, frantically nodding his head. "Not everything matches up with my theories, but that is why they were mere theories and there is a wealth of knowledge here no matter what. I mean, I mean, just look over there," he said, pointing right and towards the forest and above that the mountain. "What do you see?"

"Uh, ruins, trees... some shrubs I guess?" Ruby guessed.

"Yes those are all there, but what I noticed when scouting the towns perimeter were strategically placed holes and passages. These were designed to work like drains for the rain and snow that fell down upon them, even the village itself has a faint few 'dips' in its layout," Oobleck said, bending his hand to illustrate his point. "From what I can see, this would let the water flow out below the village but also let them collect it. All while feeding the local flora and fauna with the gutter system, utterly fascinating! Such a brilliant bit of engineering, those who built this town were quite clever," Oobleck said appreciatively.

"That is all good to know, but we were meant to be finding this Treasure Hunter of yours, weren't we?" Blake cut in.

"Hm?" Oobleck said, rubbing his chin. "Yes, yes, Miss Belladonna you're correct. In fact, perhaps we are not even in the right place at all."

"What!?" Ruby cried, jumping down from her tree.

"I merely mean that Cooper should have gravitated towards the firework as well, it was half the reason why I suggested using them in the first place seeing as he won't pick up his Scroll. Thus he may in fact not be here, but somewhere else on the mountain that could hold an even larger settlement. The estimated population of the clans and rebellious miners was quite large after all, but then," he sighed, "Maybe I am too attached to my theories. I suppose though," he continued just as Blake had opened her mouth, "That more of Morius could be underground and Cooper is there... Or he's dead," Oobleck added, unhappily.

"Well we have to check either way, don't we?" Blake said.

"Yeah if he is here he might be hurt and need help!" Ruby added.

"You are correct, well then, let us begin exploring, the fabled Morius and see what secrets it holds," Oobleck paused, raised a single finger and said, "and please do be careful not to break anything."

"We'll try," Ruby cheered as she shot off towards the city.

"Ruby slow down!" Weiss called.

What happened next was like something out of a story book. Blake watched as Ruby stepped on a thin line of metal wire buried beneath the grass. Barely registering it she shot into the street only for the first great tile beneath her to slide out from under her feet. Yang's shout of surprise as she shot forward followed by the others rang in Blake's ears.

Thankfully Ruby unleashed a wave of rose petal and launched herself upwards. She was just fast enough to dodge the claws of a Beowolf that burst from the hole, lunging into the air after her.
Yang let loose a blast from Ember Celica into the Grim's back that launched it forward.

Blake heard something 'clunk!' seconds after Ruby manged to back flip over the flailing creature to land on stone path. The Beowolf was not so lucky, the moment it landed something else was set off and the Grim howled in pain as lightning lanced around its form sizzling the creature and keeping it trapped until Blake unloaded a few rounds into its head and the Grim shattered into tiny black fractals.

"What do I do!" Ruby cried as she wobbled, only one foot on the path and her arms held precariously wide as she tried to avoid setting off anything else.

"Don't do anything!" Weiss barked.

"I believe all the traps have been sprung bu-" Oobleck started.

"Ruby!" Yang shouted, not even stopping for a moment Yang leapt over the gaping hole and started patting her sister down looking for wounds.

While a bit more wary than the frantic blonde, the remainder of their party joined the sisters on the stone slab. Oobleck hung back to look at the trap door. Weiss was muttering something about Dust triggers near the first corner where the Beowolf had been electrocuted. Blake meanwhile gave Ruby a quick look over and saw she was fine and moved on to investigate the clunking noise she'd heard.

'Hm, that's odd,' Blake thought, running her hands along the patterned carved stone she found a deep thin hole in the roof of the house on her left. Looking to her side Blake saw a matching hole. Squinting a little and silently being grateful for her night vision Blake felt her eyebrows shoot up. "Its a spear trap, but I guess the spear broke so nothing came out," she said.

"Strange I'd have imagined the traps would have stopped working or been torn apart by the Grim," Oobleck said as he stepped away from the pit fall. "The claw marks scattered about would certainly indicated a battle took place and even if the traps weren't all destroyed they should have deactivated after so long."

"All I know is whoever made this place is a jerk," Yang seethed, still clutching Ruby's shoulders, with tiny flames glimmering on her golden mane.

"Come on Yang it wasn't 'that' bad," Ruby said. "It was kinda cool, besides I don't think any of it would have really hurt me."

"Probably not, though this Lightning Trap would have given you a shock," Weiss cut in.

The remaining four Hunters stared at Weiss only for Ruby and Oobleck to let out a snorts of laughter. 'Though I can't tell if Ruby's is sarcastic or not,' Blake thought as she just stared at Weiss in silent judgement.

"Not the time Weiss," Yang sighed.

"What? It was funny!" Weiss insisted, spinning around to face the group.

Waving his hand to call for a pause Oobleck spoke, "Hilarious japes aside what did you discover Miss Schnee?"
"Oh of course," Weiss said, a faint blush visible on her cheeks even as she spun around. "From what I can tell there's Shock-Dust Crystals installed somewhere in the foundations. Maybe connected to some sort of pressure plate? Whatever the case if you try and pass through here," Weiss started before placing the tip of her sword before her.

They all instinctively recoiled as lightning began to crackle and thrash in the air wrapping around the blades tip.

The cocky smirk Weiss sent back was not entirely unexpected. The Huntresses sword began to glow faintly and the lightning coiled around it obediently and was quickly absorbed into the weapon. "Its quite harmless so long as you have control. As for power, well, it'll give you a start but it wasn't even enough to kill that Beowolf, so I'm not sure what the point is," she shrugged.

"Yeah I mean shouldn't traps be a bit more," Ruby shrugged, "deadly?"

"Please don't say that after you just survived one," Yang said, patting Ruby on the head.

"I doubt miss Rose was in any real danger, I believe these traps were more to trip up and confuse the first interlopers, be they Grim or otherwise. These would never win the day for the inhabitants but I can see the versatility of it," Oobleck explained.

"So what, we're going to have to disarm and trigger all the traps on our way through this maze?" Yang asked with a forceful shrug.

"I do not imagine so, I doubt they would have many traps within the city itself, the outer perimeter is the best and safest place for such things things. Still, we should proceed with caution," Oobleck instructed.

And with that, they were off.

Chapter End Notes

Here we are again, as usual I'd like to thank my beta reader PersonsWithManyAliases on SB for their help with this story, I hope anyone who read this chapter enjoyed it and if you have any questions queries or comments please don't be shy :)

I am sorry if the traps seem a little underwhelming, in truth once I thought about it I wasn't sure one could really make very effective traps (for Hunters/big Grimm) without giant piles of Dust so I went with them being more something to cause some anarchy in whatever force tried to get into the town.

There's actually a really nice, detailed, map of Remnant on RWBY Wiki which I based the location of Morius on, I can't post the map here sadly but suffice to say its a big patch of green on a mountain side. That green spot had a big part in helping me conceptualise Morius as a viable location and helped guide my design of it for the rest of the story.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tightly packed stone streets surrounded the band of Hunters. Overgrown vines covered the engraved grey walls and roots tore their way through the stone. Even after centuries of isolation nature had yet to ware away at the city. On the odd occasion they would find the remnants of a blade or dusty skeletal fragments buried in the rubble and lost within the overgrown plants.

With every few steps a minute pulse of Aura was sent out, a miniature shock wave, like ripples atop a pond, meant to reveal any traps or preempt any Grimm that might be lying in wait.

Ruby grinned when she saw Blake's ears twitch, arm rising up out of her cloak the Faunus pointed towards a house at the corner. "At least three Grim, patient enough to wait, but they can't be too big, fitting in there together," she said.

"I'm the lure," Yang cut in, grabbing Ruby's shoulder and pulling her back before she could rush forward.

"But Yang I can dodge," Ruby said, she could hear her voice rising high as she spoke.

"And I can take a hit, if you dodge the floor could give out, explode or who knows what? There's too many traps in this freaking place," Yang muttered as she marched ahead of the group.

The rest of them readied their weapons, though Ruby heard Oobleck hum thoughtfully as his thermos unfolded into a flamethrower.

Yang strutted to a stop outside the house and clanked Ember Celica together, "Din dins!" she called.

That was all it took, two creeps and a Beowolf, all well armoured, exploded through the houses door with angry snarls. Only for the speedy Beowolf to be greeted by an explosive punch as Yang crowed, "Its knuckle sandwiches, I hope you want seconds!"

Crescent Rose shook as Ruby yanked back the firing mechanism and a bullet tore into one of the Creeps heads sending it bouncing down the street and into another lightning trap where it exploded.

The last found itself caught in Gambol Shroud's whip and blasted into oblivion by the combined strength of Weiss and Oobleck's Burn Dust blasts.

Yang looked around and shrugged, "Was that it? I thought Grimm with that much armour could take a bit more punishment."

"Indeed, while older than their juvenile counterparts these Grimm do indeed appear comparatively weak. Take, take the Ursa Miss Rose and Miss Schnee faced in the forest," Oobleck said hastily. "Its size should have made it a fearsome and willy foe, but instead it was taken out with ease and could not comprehend being outmanoeuvred so quickly. I believe that the local Grimm population were mostly newborns who survived Morius's fall."
"So what, they've just been waiting here for, for centuries?" Weiss spluttered.

Nodding Oobleck said, "That does seem most likely yes, though usually for them all to have stayed they would need more than that... Regardless, by waiting here they could ambush anyone who returned and ensure that Morius can never be a home again."

The four Huntresses glanced towards one another at that, and then shrugged, the Grimm would be Grimm after all.

"I'm still amazed anyone could live here at all," Yang said they started walking again, Weiss quickly muting the Shock Trap as they went. "I mean, all these traps make it crazy, and half the houses we looked in were stacked full of ruined boxes and and some other junk."

"Yang's got a point," Ruby said, "I mean, shouldn't there be like, leftover chairs and stuff at least?"

"Maybe they were preparing for a siege?" Blake guessed.

"Or the city served some other purpose, or we are simply missing something," Oobleck continued frantically. "We know too little to make any assumptions so far and-"

They all froze as Blake spun around and snapped, "Someone's in trouble!" before shooting out of one of her after images and over half a block.

Ruby ran up one of the buildings walls and surged into the air, closely followed by Oobleck, Weiss and bringing up the rear, Yang.

"Dammit, stop rushing in!" Yang shouted, her voice clear and harsh even over the wind.

Ruby ignored it for the moment though as a band of Beowolves appeared in her peripheral vision, the swarming mass of claws and teeth leaping atop a struggling figure. Spinning Crescent Rose, Ruby fired left and sent of pulse of Aura rippling through her body that dragged her towards the pack.

In a red and black blur she and Blake struck, hurling the snapping ravenous monsters into the air with the force of the combined strikes. Ruby barely had time to brandish Crescent Rose before bullets and Glyphs bound the Beowolves over head and they were roasted in the combined power of Yang and Oobleck's attacks.

With the Grimm fading Ruby and Blake went and steadied the man who the Beowolves had been piling on top of.

A little taller than Yang the man had a soft face, copper eyes and short straw blonde hair hidden beneath a tattered, wide brimmed hat. The man let out ragged gasps as he leaned up against the wall, brown poncho rising and falling with his hat dipping over his face. "Thank you.... You got here just in time," He gasped.

"Cooper, here drink!" Oobleck instructed as he blurred to the man's side.

Taking the thermos gratefully Cooper gulped down the piping hot liquid and let out a moan of relief, almost seeming to melt against the wall in relief. Finally he pulled the thermos away and let out a ragged gasp, "Oh that hits the spot, I haven't had a drink since yesterday."
"Here, you're all dirty too," Weiss said uncomfortably, passing the blonde a damp pure white hanky.

Blinking owlishly for a moment Cooper finally took the cloth and said, "Ah thank-ye ma'am, you're all too kind," as he wiped the dust and dirt from his face. "Seems you brought good back up Oobleck, I'm right happy you're here."

"I'm relieved to see you are alive as well Cooper, though I have to ask, where were you!?" Oobleck asked, grasping the man's shoulder. "We used signal fireworks to try and call for you and you didn't show, is your Scroll still working? And why didn't you send clearer coordinates?"

Cooper's eyes were wide as his mouth slowly opened and closed, Cooper seemingly too staggered at the barrage of questions.

Yang clapped Oobleck on the shoulder, "Ah maybe give him a minute doc?"

"Doctor," Oobleck chided, "but yes, my apologies for rushing you. Here eat something," Oobleck said, offering Cooper a jerky strip.

"Thank ye," Cooper said, tearing into the meaty snack. As he chewed the man spoke, "I didn't come for the firework show cos I didn't know it was here, I've been skulking around the undergrounds for days." he chuckled, "Helps keep the Grimm off my back, dumb as led they are, but tough bastards when you're on your own."

Cooper took another swig of Oobleck's thermos, wiped his mouth on his sleeve and continued, "I noticed some of the Grimm making a beeline upwards and heard gun fire, that's when I came up from hidin. As for the message, sorry Doc, Scroll was low on battery when I was sending the first one and I wanted to make it clear you needed to get here fast. Plus, well, you know how politics can be, better to keep this to ourselves," Coopers eyes trailed across the rest of them and Ruby could see the man's scepticism upon looking at her.

"Team- uh," Oobleck started before stammering and looking to them helplessly.

"Xiao?" Yang suggested, grinning manically.

"Bullet Thorns," Ruby squeed.

"Knights of..." Weiss trailed off.

"Errant... Knights maybe?" Blake cut in.

Seemingly satisfied Oobleck continued at his usual rapid fire pace, "The Knights Errant are Huntresses, independent of Beacon. They are dependable and can keep a secret I am sure."

"We're great at secret keeping, I mean, we even kept our name secret from our contractor!" Ruby said.

"Ah see," Cooper said, arching an eyebrow in obvious confusion. Finally shrugging it off Cooper continued, "Anyway I've been using my time to scout around, figure this place out and there's some stuff here you gotta see to believe."
"Really?" Ruby asked. She glanced around as all eyes fell on her. "Sorry its just, well its cool but other than the traps isn't this just kind of a big village ruin?"

Cooper grinned, which only made his growing beard more obvious as he said, "If that's all you've seen of this city, then I gotta a lot to show ya. There's plenty more to this place than some brick and trip wires, let me tell you." Grunting Cooper pushed himself up against the wall and rose to his full height with a deep in take of breath. "Aura's tanking up, I should be back at one hundred percent soon," he said.

"Capital!" Oobleck cheered, "Then you can show us what you've uncovered?"

Turning Cooper strode confidently down the street waving for them to follow. "Follow me and I'll take ya to the real secrets of this place. Don't mind the traps, I've disabled some going this way and know the rest." With that Cooper led them down a winding zig zagging path through the streets before he came to a stop outside a boxy looking building that seemed just like all the others.

"So tell us what's behind door number one Cooper," Yang said, putting on a deep voice like she was an announcer.

Chuckling Cooper flourished his poncho like a cape, Ruby was an expert flourisher so he knew the signs, and stepped into the house.

Glancing around Ruby couldn't see much of a difference, thick walls, a boxy room, carved stone floors, though one floors corners was uneven. There were also some- 'Huh?' she thought, looking at some stone gears in the deepest corner of the room, "Haven't seen many gears yet" she said.

"I stumbled on these by accident early into my search, it had some Freeze Dust worked in which I think helped it all last this long. Though the room was a right mess before I cleared it out," cooper said, shaking his head.

Ruby decided not to reflect on what the 'mess' in question might have been.

For his part Cooper placed his hand on the largest top-most gear and, well, Ruby couldn't sense it but she could just tell he was infusing his Aura into it. Much like the rest of Morius the faint but sharp hum of Dust rang out when someone did something and in this case the gears began to spin, grinding and lurching for a few moments before getting smoother. Right before them a quarter of the floor that had been slightly lower than the rest dropped further and began to grumble as it ground against the rest of the stone in the house as it was drawn below the floor and-

"Holy crap," Yang murmured, as what looked like a weathered but still functional elevator rose up before them and ground to a halt. It was metal unlike so much else in the city, mostly just four-part frame with a solid base, the rest of it being totally open. Age might have taken its tole on the ancient machines speed but all its vital components had weathered the test of time.

"Mighty impressive right? I tell ya, I wouldn't have believed Faunus built something like this," Cooper coughed as the room seemed to drop several degrees and four sets of eyes turned on him, none harder than Blake's. "Cos, you know, they were slaves back then, where'd they get the engineers?" Cooper shrugged.

Blake merely shrugged and marched into the elevator, closely followed by the rest of them while Oobleck took a moment to marvel at the contraption.
"Amazing, simply astounding, we've seen draw bridges like this in the Emerald Forest but to see them here and in working condition!" The man was practically squealing with delight as he stepped into the elevator, muttering about counter weights and Dust stasis mechanisms.

Ruby could hear Cooper sigh at that but frankly this was the first time since the fireworks that she'd be one hundred percent into what Oobleck was talking about. "This is so cool," Ruby whispered as the elevator began to grind its way back down. "I mean just look at all the stuff they made, with just stones and a bit of Dust!"

"It is impressive," Blake said, something like the faint outline of a smile visible only thanks to her shining eyes.

"Hope you all brought a light source," Cooper started to say only for Yang to chuckle.

The blonde slapped her palms together, took in a breath and her hair began to shine like a miniature sun. "Got it covered," Yang said proudly.

"So how deep does this go?" Weiss asked as the room they'd been standing in vanished.

Cooper hummed and said, "A good ways, something like a kilometre or two maybe? Hard to make a good guess down here with the Grimm and collapsed halls fouling up my work," he muttered.

They all gasped at what came into sight next. It was a simple hallways, in theory, but it stretched on for what seemed like ages. Just like the streets above blocky houses were cut right out of the stone. Lanterns with what Ruby could only assume was Dust were attached to the walls but had clearly long since died out. Strangely angled beams cut across the hallways ceiling, 'They don't look like supports?' Ruby thought quizzically.

The elevator continued its descent and they were greeted by larger and deeper hall was filled with homes, storage facilities and even the remnants of habitation. The builders seeming phobia of empty spaces was as clear as ever. Engravings covering the floors and patterns running across the floors and ceiling, some offering directions others being much more confusing or 'stylistic' as Oobleck had put it.

"It gets wider the further down ya go until you hit the dead centre, then it shrinks again till ya hit the bottom, which is about as big as the town up there," Cooper said.

"Incredible, an entire city hidden from the world above. I've read of such things but so rarely have I had the chance to see one, and so masterfully crafted and hewn!" The man enthused, zipping around the confines of their elevator, snapping picturing and grinning widely.

"But how did they eat?" Weiss asked. "Nothing this large could subsist on hunting and the farms up there couldn't have supported more than a few families at best."

"An excellent questions," Oobleck said, finally coming to a stop and rubbing his chin. It was a good thing too, Ruby could see he'd been wearing holes into the floor with all that dashing about. "I imagine whatever they produced would have to have been filling and producible in large quantities and beyond that, uh," he gasped.

"The map!" Yang cut in.

Oobleck pointed at her and nodded, "Yes exactly, those farms we found, there would be dozens
more in the mountains and there must have been more in the low lands, or must have been any way," he added unhappily. "They must have not have just eaten it but preserved the food and brought it here-"

"The pickled turnips ain't so great," Cooper chuckled, only to see Oobleck staring at him aghast. Shrugging the Treasure Hunter said, "What? There were some jars and I ran out of food."

"Please refrain from eating historical artefacts!" Oobleck lectured.

"Right right," Cooper said lazily waving his hands even as he rolled his eyes, clearly paying not attention to Oobleck's chastisement.

"So they brought food here and lived underground then?" Blake asked. Her voice was quiet but her eyes were wide as she took in everything with a vision Ruby couldn't replicate without a scope.

"Yes, yes, Morius may not have been a city where all of its inhabitant always lived, hence the traps, but instead a fortress city they could retreat to with a small permanent population to work on maintenance," Oobleck mused.

"So how could it have fallen?" Weiss asked, eyes flashing to Blake's back. "Scouting this place would have been a nightmare and this must have taken years of work."

"Excellent questions again Miss Schnee, we can assume it was the Grim, the camouflage would only be of so much use against them. Thus what would be needed is some sort of great stress, anger, despair-"

"Fear," Blake cut in.

"Yes," Oobleck added, "Or fear, if the Grimm came, or were even guided here by the skirmishes and scorched earth campaigns that took place in the low lands centuries ago, they could have come in great enough numbers that they could have overwhelmed the defences and... Well, we are left with merely a ruin instead of a bustling city state," Oobleck said softly, gesturing towards the darkened halls.

Yang's hands flew over Ruby's eyes when a mass of skeletons came into view and for once Ruby didn't try to stop her sister.

The silence was broken again by Cooper who said, "There's a bit more to this place than a ruin, though I need more... expert help to figure it all out. Truth is, this is the best preserved spot in the whole city, much the rest of its caved in or been torn up by the Grim, gods they punched this place full of holes," he muttered.

"So how long will it take to get to the centre?" Ruby asked, turning to Coopered. "That is where we're going right?"

"Right you are ma'am," Cooper nodded, "Anyway at this speed, maybe twenty minutes, thirty tops. I can make it a bit faster if ya like though," he added with a grin and a flick of his hat.

"Yes please!" Ruby said.

Cooper grasped a lever that reminded Ruby of a stick shift, that was connected to the elevators floor and pulled it down with a clunk.
That was when Ruby felt the ground give out under her, Weiss and Blake seemed to both yowl and screech in surprise as the elevator stopped grinding and simply dropped like a stone dropped from a great height.

"What the crap!!" Yang shouted as they were lifted into the air by the forced, the blonde dragging Ruby into her arms while Weiss summoned her Glyphs to keep everyone rooted to the floor, a Glyph that also conveniently kept her and Ruby's skirts from flying up.

Only Cooper seemed unperturbed, feet rooted firmly to the floor and poncho only flapping weakly in the breeze as the elevator let out a whine and began to grind itself to a stop, the metal screeching and wheezing under the strain.

"Again!" Ruby chirped.

"No again!" Everyone save Cooper snapped.

"Hehe, sorry bout that, thought it'd be a might bit funny," Cooper offered as he scratched the back of his head.

"Please be more careful you could have damaged some... Miss Be-" Oobleck started only for Weiss to kick the doctor in the shins.

"Miss B, what's wrong?" Yang said loudly, not having yet let go of Ruby's shoulders.

"I heard something moving but its faint," Blake said.

"Ah shit-" cooper started.

"Language," Yang hissed.

Ignoring the blonde Cooper shrugged, "I was just having fun, sorry didn't think it'd lure anything of note."

"Its gone quiet," Blake said, "It seemed far away but the acoustics in this place aren't making it easy to pin point anything," she added.

Oobleck humphed, "Well we'll have to deal with that when the time comes, for the moment let us please not do anything to bring Grimm down upon us."

Cooper rubbed the back of his head and smiled, "Right, sorry, sorry, but trust me once you see this you'll forgive everything," Cooper said as he led them out of the elevator.

Rather than another hallway as before this new level was claustrophobic, metal pipes and bars running in seemingly every direction. The damaged ones showed thin Dust Crystals embedded inside and before them was a sealed stone door that looked five inches thick. Save for the massive hole blasted into its centre through which they could easily pass.

Cooper bowed grandly and said, "Huntresses and experts first."

Yang and Blake both stepped forward, rolling their eyes at the man while Yang said, "You ready miss B?"
"Always... Little Y," Blake added as she slid up to the gaping hole in the door.

"I never should have told you what my name meant," Yang said with a laugh, only to freeze when Blake let out a gasp.

They all fell into battle stances but Blake merely shook her head and waved them in. "Its empty," she said roughly, before sliding through the hole, quickly followed by Oobleck and Weiss.

Yang cast a worried look back at her but Ruby met her sisters concerned eyes with a determined stare, that definitely didn't look like a pout no matter what anyone might have said.

Finally Yang sighed and relented, marching through the hole with Ruby on her heels.

"Woah," Ruby gasped, her face illuminated by a faintly emerald shine.

It was a Dust Crystal, the mother of all Dust Crystals. Slotted into a gargantuan mass of metal beams that wrapped around its centre and were lodged into its top and bottom like needles. In the centre of the vast chamber the crystal stood taller than a two story building and was half the size of a city block.

For a moment it seemed everyone was struck speechless by the overwhelming grandeur of it all.

"Pretty big ain't it?" Cooper chuckled.

And like that the spell was broken and Ruby started to take in the sights around her in full. The metal beams ran throughout the massive chamber. Up above there was, near as she could tell a cat walk that would have let people stand before the higher bars all of which connected to the walls, floor and ceiling like it was, "A crystal heart," she whispered to herself.

It was only when Ruby stopped trying to put the massive... thing, before her together in her head that she noticed there were bones on the floor. Most were little more than dust but she could see and more than that feel them crunching under her boots/ Cracked skulls and splintered rib cages seemed to be scattered carelessly about. Some still had weapons or or faint traces or clothing on their scattered remains; the worst perhaps were the one's that were massed piles.

'They were huddling together...' Ruby thought, a sick taste in her mouth and an unpleasant shaky feeling in her chest.

'A massacre, this wasn't even a real fight, it couldn't have been,' Ruby thought. Stray memories of how she and the others cornered and surrounded bands of Grimm and overwhelmed the confused beasts flashed in her mind. The few stray horns and fangs Ruby saw told her why Blake had gasped like she had. Turning she saw Yang had already gone to the Faunus's side where Blake was seemingly staring at a wall rather than the scattered bones.

"Miss Be- B," Oobleck quickly corrected, "If you don't wish to stay I will understand.

Blake and Yang spoke between themselves for a moment and finally Yang clapped Blake on the back. Turning around Blake shook her head, "Its fine, this was a long time ago, I just needed a moment."

"Very well then," Oobleck nodded. "If no one minds then please scout around, I would like to understand the nature of this... crystal heart," Oobleck said staring at the centre of the room. "And perhaps we will find something else of note."

"How about we handle this side Doctor while Cooper catches you up on what he already knows?"
Weiss suggested.

"Capital idea Miss Schnee," Oobleck said, Cooper merely shrugging and following the green haired doctor to the centre of the chamber.

Ruby and Weiss quickly joined Blake and Yang at the wall.

Blake let out a low shuddering breath as she stared at the faded inscriptions on the wall. The smell of death had faded over time, replaced by dust and musty air. But the bones were practically everywhere, each step she took it felt like she was stepping onto a corpse.

'This was a city, it was a home to so many Faunus and now its just a tomb, if things hadn't,' Blake shuddered. The faint scent of fire struck her nostrils and Blake's ears twitched as she heard Yang shuffle up near her. 'Human!' A familiar and hateful voice growled in the back of her mind. The blonde was careful and slow in her approach, 'Like approaching a cornered animal,' a familiarly rough voice whispered.

"Blake," Yang whispered, her voice tight. "We can go, right now, the money isn't worth it, just say the word and we're out of here, I'll carry you even," Yang said insistently, finally wrapping her arms around Blake's shoulders.

Blake shook off the chill in her chest as she heard overheard Oobleck make a similar offer. Forcing the words past the ball in her throat Blake finally said, "Its fine, this was a long time ago, I just needed a moment."

As Oobleck and Weiss spoke Yang leaned in and whispered, "If you need to talk, I'm here, we all are."

Ruby and Weiss both shuffled up at her sides, seemingly unsure of what to do with themselves. "Its... well its not fine, I was just thinking... if Morius had survived would I maybe have been born here, grown up in the fifth kingdom?"

"Well," Weiss said slowly and in that slightly high tone she used when bringing up some random trivia she was proud of. "Technically you'd have never been born, I mean the statistical improbability of you existing in that scenario is... absurd," she finished lamely.

Off at Yang's side Ruby shrugged, "She's not wrong if everything sex-ed says is true."

"You two have no imagination," Yang muttered. Even as they tried to lighten her mood Blake could feel them watching her, careful not to push too hard or too fast.

"Perhaps," Blake said, eyes going back to the engravings on the wall. Spaced out Pictographs matching up with the chaotic steel bars that seemed to run all over the chamber, showing Dust crystals, hand prints and Faunus figures.

"So do you know what any of these mean?" Ruby asked, bobbing up and down a little in nervousness. "You and Oobleck talked about them a lot," Ruby elaborated.

Shaking her head Blake tried to ignore the cracking under her feet as she moved deeper into the chamber. "I don't recognise these ones but, ah, here we are," she said. Blake pointed to near the bottom of the engravings which showed a sturdy brick house assaulted by stylised winds and the shadowy forms of the Grimm pressing in on all sides. "This one seems to be the story of the Four Maidens. That's the ancient immortal shut-ins house, his bitterness and isolation drawing the Grimm to him with the beasts only failing to find him thanks to his magic."
Blake pointed to the next bracket up showing four women descending, one from the sun, with wings on her back and a robe. Another came from the clouds and had sturdy horns on her head and a woollen coat. A third grew up from the earth and was positioned on the right bottom side, opposite the sun and right in its rays; she wore leaves as clothes and had a long tail. The last was opposite to the woman of clouds, in place of robes and soft textures the woman wore what looked like wooden armour and she showed large tusks and sharp teeth.

"The Maidens are drawn to this place, to meet and celebrate their time together during..." Blake rubbed her chin, "I think its the equinox?" She shrugged. The next tablet showed a bony figure with a long beard tattered clothes and a trunk-nose, watching from the house as the four women came together.

"Whatever the case the miser sat, jealous of their bond, convinced he was alone in the world and that he would never have anyone or need anyone. But then, the Maidens called to him, offered to teach him of him the growing things, the skills to hunt, a means to rest in the cold and how to travel across the land under the heat of the sun."

"Their joy and the happiness they brought to him made the mans home unappetising to the Grimm and they left him be. In return for their kindness and acceptance he gifted them each with a fraction of old magic given to him in ancient times. This magic he granted them each a quarter of, it let them join with the natural cycle of the world and be reborn time and time again. While he was finally given the chance to move on and join his loved ones in spirit where even the Four Maidens of Summer, Winter, Spring and Autumn would join him, as their power was passed onto the next generation."

"Wow," Yang said quietly, Ruby looked totally enraptured for a moment before blinking owlishly.

"You're a really good storyteller Blake, I never heard the Four Maidens like that before," she said, smiling up at Blake.

"But wait, why are they all Faunus, and some of those details don't match up, like what's this equinox thing?" Weiss said sharply, jabbing at the picture.

"You think all the Maidens were human?" Blake asked, arching an eyebrow at the former heiress.

"A common misconception!" Oobleck called from over by the giant crystal. They turned to stare at the doctor who continued. "The only details known regarding the maidens from the oldest recording telling merely says "Four Maidens and an old Wizard". Beyond that we know nothing," Oobleck said, cutting his hands through the air. "Thus each culture tends to apply its own aesthetic to the tale, its quite common really so technically all readings are correct." He then turned back to Cooper and motioned towards one of the gaping holes in the chamber, "So what do you suppose caused that?"

"Something big?" Cooper shrugged.

Turning away from the discussion Blake shrugged and said, "Faunus, those of us who remember, tend to have a more... mystical look on the world at times. Things like the Maidens and rituals, faith in old stories," she explained, rubbing her arms to displace the chill that set upon her.

"So, wait, have you not been doing any of that stuff because we're around?" Yang asked, eyes wide with worry.

"What? No, no, I don't- I was never really taught much of it until I was too old to really..."
understand it," Blake said softly. "By the time I met Faunus who actually had lessons like that to teach I wasn't able to speak with them much and most of its forgotten now save bits and pieces."

"Ah..." Yang said, licking her lips nervously before guiding her to the next chamber wall as fast as she could, "So, uh, recognise this one? Its shiny so it caught my interest," she tried to joke.

Happy for a distraction Blake stared at the images. Shadowy beasts descended upon stylised figures, crystal buried deep underground and a small fire-light in the people's chest.

"I think its depicting people from before Dust, maybe even Aura?" Blake guessed. Eyes straying up she found the shiny thing Yang had mentioned, specifically there was a warrior who had metallic irises that gleamed in the faint light of the giant Dust crystal.


"Still they seem to be doing pretty well," Yang said, waving her hand towards the figure whose eyes were now surrounded by larger pools of silver as large amorphous shadow with rubies for eyes bared down upon them.

"I think they're fighting something with... some other power, the metal looks like silver but I don't really know any stories like that," Blake said.

"Well," Oobleck called from where he and Cooper were inspecting what looked like a circular alter around the base of the Dust Crystal. "There are some stories about silver being used to ward off the Grim, and other tales of silver eyed warriors who battled the Creatures of Grimm as well. Before Dust or Aura were discovered," he added as an afterthought.

Their eyes all shot to Ruby who squeaked, but before she could act Yang shot around behind her and giggled. "So my sister has super Grimm killing powers? Awesome, phew, phew!" She said, directing Ruby at imaginary Grimm like she was a gun.

"Yang!" Ruby shouted, playfully punching her sister in the face.

Blake and Weiss shared a mirthful grin but quickly ignored the ensuing anarchic squabble and returned to looking at the pictographs. They came to a stop before what looked like a metal panel jutting out of the wall that connected to a long steel beam that was bolted to the wall and travelled all the way back to the Giant Dust Crystal in the centre. Indented on the panel were two hands and above it were pictographs showing... "I think this is a map of the city, or a section of it at least?" Blake said.

Weiss leaned in and said, "Do you think its to, well, I'd suggest power the facility, but power what?"

"I don't know, and how do the hands prints connect to it and the map?" Blake mused.

"It kinda reminds me of the Amity Colosseum," Yang said, dragging Ruby up behind the monochrome duo.

"It does look like Gravity Dust but-" Weiss froze.

They all froze.

"Ruby check for more panels," Blake said.

In an instant Ruby exploded from Yang's hold and blurred around the chamber before shooting
back to them and skidding along the cracked ground. "I found more, there's like dozens, some are broken but all the positions match and the whole ting looks like its divided into sections and levels all interconnected!"

"No way," Yang murmured, looking at her Gauntlets then up at the second and third levels of the chamber.

Weiss spun around and slapped her hands against the hand-prints and gasped as it lit up.

"I can channel my Aura through it, just like anything else but I can feel the outline and Dust residue, its designed to flow down one way," she said motioning to her left, "and then there's a path connecting it to the crystal," she said, nodding towards the centre of the chamber.

"If this is what I think it is.... Then no one is going to believe us," Weiss whispered.

Exchanging a glance they all ran over to Oobleck and Cooper who seemed to be discussing the crystal as well.

"It certainly explains how their forces were able to move so much so fast, uncovering this crystal must have been what allowed the slaves to break free and escape," Oobleck said, sounding truly enthralled.

"Wasn't enough in the end though," Cooper said with a shrug.

"Doctor we think we know what all of this is!" Ruby enthused.

"Oh?" Oobleck said, spinning around to face them. "I had some theories as well but-

Ruby ignored him, words spilling frantically from her lips as she gestured around the chamber, "All these panels, all the metal beams and poles are actually all over Morius and are lined with Dust!"

Weiss, took over, "It all connects back together like some huge interlocking mechanism!"

Blake gestured widely and said, "All pictographs above the panels are instructions and internal maps with the hand holds being how people channelled their Aura into the city."

Yang was last, her words as hurried as her teams, "The people in the centre," she gestured to the large panels the two men stood in front of, "channel Aura into the crystal and start pumping the power through the steal beams towards the panels and-

"And then those in charge of the panels siphon the energy further out, mostly likely to other station attendant who empowers the energy again. Enhancing the Gravity Dust and channelling its energies to other sections of Morius eventually infusing the entire complex with the energised Dust!" Oobleck roared, slapping his hands against his hard hat. "Genius! Morius isn't just a hidden city," he said, spinning in place. "Its not merely a fortress! Its actually a flying fortress city!"

"Another simple point made long," Cooper muttered under his breath.

"Its incredible, there are terminals like the one's we found here scattered all over the city to help with the controls, and Dust, more Dust would have to be woven into its frame and other sections of the city to add to the propulsion," Weiss said frantically. "For something like this you'd need perhaps, fifty, sixty people at a minimum. All of whom would have to be incredibly well trained in utilising Aura to guide, control and stabilise Dust."
"The wanderers they picked up?" Blake suggested.

"Possible," Oobleck said, slapping his cheeks in excitement. "Or perhaps the rebellion had been in the making for much longer than we know, or, oh my this opens up so many more questions."

Something skidded along stone and Blake's ears perked up, "Wait did anyone else hear that?" she asked. The sound was coming from two directions, at least, one on the left side of the chamber, the other on the right.

"No I d- there's a Grimm behind you," Oobleck said hurriedly.

"Oobleck behind you!" Yang shouted even as she spun around to face hear teams attacker.

Both sets of Hunters spun around in unison to see the enemy baring down upon their backs only to stare in dull shock.

Four red eyes shone in the darkness. An almost liquid figure slid and drifted high above them Huntresses and stared down at them. Its jaw unhinged, almost in slow motion, as it let out a tyrannical and deafening roar that shook the city beneath their feat.

"That... is the biggest King Taijitu... I have ever seen..." Said a shaky voice. Cooper was looking between the two heads frantically, terror clear on his features.

Ruby cocked her sniper rifle and grinned, only stopping to flick out her Scroll and snap a picture before she grinned and said, "Lets kill it."

"Knights Errant you take one half of the King Taijitu I shall handle the other, Cooper stay here where its safe!" Oobleck ordered.

"No question!" Cooper screamed.

"We got it," Ruby said.

The Grimm shot towards them, its gargantuan jaw unhinged and unleashing a powerful blast of air that kicked up dust and bones.

"Ice Dragon!" Ruby bellowed over the screech, both herself and Blake darting left and right respectively.

Weiss thrust her blade forward and with a cry conjured several Glyphs before the Grimm.

The Grimm collided with the Glyphs and smashed its way through the Aura construct even as ice exploded across its head like fire upon oily parchment. Just as it was about to reach Weiss the Dust mage hurled herself backwards, one last Glyph appearing before the Grimm.

Yang launched herself forward and sent her flaming fists rocketing through the Speed Glyph where it crashed against the Grimm's icy mask with a crack that turned into an explosive shatter. Bits of Grimm mask and icy flesh soared across the chamber as the monster threw itself back with a wail of pain.

"Ladybug!" Ruby ordered.

Before the Grimm could get its baring a black and red blur shot at it from either side. They blurred past one another, blades flashing as they slashed as its underbelly. Each strike barely centimetres apart, digging deeper into its armoured hide with each strike.
Before Weiss and Yang could jump in though the Grimm dragged itself back into the gaping hole from whence it came. They glanced behind themselves to see Oobleck standing before a wreath of fire where the other half of King Taijitu had been moments before.

The resounding feeling seemed to be 'Was that it?'

Then it struck, in a single instant the white half of the King Taijitu exploded through the floor.

Yang let out a startled cry as the white half's jaw closed on her.

"YAAANG!" Ruby wailed, her cry matched by Weiss and Blake as the trio hurled themselves towards the Grim. tactics forgotten as they unleashed as flurry of wild attacks as the hissing titan.

At that same moment, during Oobleck's brief moment of shock, the black half of the King Taijitu blurred from its hiding hole and swallowed him whole.

Ruby struck first, masonry and rubble trailing on the gusts of wind behind her and battering the Grim's frame as she smashed Crescent Rose wildly against its scaly body. Each slash meant to drive the tip of her scythe into the Grimm to tear open its belly as she screamed through the stinging pain in her head and her vision blurred.

Blake wrapped Gambol Shroud around the thrashing Grim's body and slammed her blade into its back. A purple blade-beam was unleashed and began tearing its way up the King Taijitu's spine causing it to fling itself backwards with a screech.

As it tried to disappear back down its hole Weiss surrounded the Grim's neck in Glyphs before it could retreat and with a banshee's shrieked unleashed a crackling storm of lighting into its eyes.

The Grimm reared back in agony and slammed its face into a nearby wall, caving it in instantaneously. Before they had time to process that strange move fire escaped from between its closed maw and finally the Grimm threw back its head and screamed as its mouth was pried open by Yang. Her body shone red and gold, a palpable aura of power rippled off her frame as she held the King Taijitu's massive fanged maw open with her right arm and brought back her left fist.

"EAT THIS!" She roared, unleashing a dozen giant blasts into its throat before the Grim's mad thrashing sent Yang hurtling across the chamber and into a nearby wall.

"Newspaper!" Ruby shouted.

Weiss conjured two Glyphs before Blake and Ruby, while summoning a third around the Grim's neck. She strained as it tugged against her the power of her soul in a bid to escape that left her feeling like something was yanking at the insides of her chest.

Before it could continue thrashing Blake dug Gambol Shroud into the base of the Grim's neck with another sword blast and wrapped her ribbon around the top of its jaw.

In a blur Ruby shot above the Grim, a trail of rose petals falling after her. Boots smashing against the chambers ceiling and unfolded Crescent Roses blade. Ruby fired her Scythe and spun as she hurtled through Weiss's Glyphs and drove her scythe into the Grimm's open jaw. Tearing through the Grim's teeth in a shower of white shrapnel Crescent Rose met its skull with a thick, wet thunk before the King Taijiru gave way with a wail and her blade dug deep into its skull before grinding to a halt. Ruby smirked as she pulled the trigger and fired a bullet straight into the Grim's brain launching herself away from the monster and back to the chamber floors.

Blake leapt away with her, just as Yang jumped back into the chamber and landed next to Weiss
and together they all watched as the Grim's body began to go limp and fall, flaky scales crumbling to nothing.

Then, behind them the King Taijitu's other half screamed, as opposed to the deep roar of before this was a weak, pained cry. They turned around just in time to see the monsters head explode and a rolling ball that unfurled to reveal itself as Oobleck burst out. The Hunter landed upon the ground, skidding for just a moment and then saluted the four of them. "Excellent kill girls, how exciting, I've not been eaten by a King Tajitiiu before! If only Port were here," he added more quietly to himself, before thinking better of it.

The Grim's body fell to nothing, something Ruby Weiss and Blake barely even noticed as they rushed to Yang's side. Ruby Hurling herself into her big sisters arms, practically sobbing as the taller woman stroked Ruby's hair and hushed her. "Shh, shh, sweetie, I'm OK, I'm so sorry it got me, but I'm fine, I'll always be fine."

Yang glanced at Blake and Weiss and said, "I know, even with my Semblance I need to watch my surroundings." She gasped as the duo wrapped their arms around her in a tight hug, causing her to gasp even as she tried to hug them back. "Hey, hey, come on guys, we're all OK," she said softly.

Slowly they disentangled themselves from the hug, Weiss even going so far as to blush a little, refusing to meet her teams eyes.

"A Grimm of that size, yes, such a thing could definitely have caused the down fall of the city," Oobleck said, picking up their conversation where it had left off. "If another assault took place up above and it struck from below and enough of the pilots were lost then Morius would never have been able to take off and escape its attackers. But then-"

Something hummed accompanied by the sound of crackling glass, a greenish light flared, shining so bright it was almost blinding and suddenly the Hunters bodies sagged. It was like led had been injected into their veins and each of them was slammed into the chamber floor, cracking it as they were imprinted upon its surface.

Five sets of eyes turned from each other in concern to the Dust Crystal in the centre of the chamber. Leaning against the crystal Cooper chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hope this chapter fulfilled the action quota I promised earlier :) As always thanks go out to my Beta Person With Many Aliases for reading this and thank you to everyone who's read, faved or commented on this story, your support is greatly appreciated!

So, a lot happened this chapter, but I hope the secret of Morius was satisfying, for a comparison I imagine the 'Gravity Engine' of the city to be comparable in size or larger than the one I assume is keeping Amity Colosseum floating, and unlike the Colosseum Morius was not intended to float all the time. I actually did some 3D renders of what I thought the engine room/chamber would look like, though they aren't perfect reflections.

This fight was fun to write, but I hope it was relatively easy to follow as I did end up resorting to the passive voice a bit tio compensate for all the different characters in
play. Thanks for the suggestion regarding Ruby taking pics of big Grimm before killing them as well, that was a grand idea :D

On the Maidens and silver eyes stories, well I have a lot of reasons for including them, such as my love of pictographs and cultural stuff, some world building, foreshadowing for future plot points, the Faunus Maidens/Wizard being done half in response to all the characters in the tale in canon being human which weirded me out, some fun with cultural commentary and finally, more world building. Though with the second one its actually me toying with an idea regarding people who live in the wilds and or many Faunus, such as Adam and the Lieutenant, being superstitious which helped Cinder recruit them even with only half the Fall Maidens power.

Anyway I hope the character interaction worked and that things were explained well enough, though there's one or two more explanations incoming next chapter.

Whatever the case if you have any questions, comments or critique I would love to hear it so please feel free to leave a comment :)
Clapping his dusty gloved hands Cooper said, "Well that went about as well as could be expected. I mean," he shrugged, "I was worried when you brought back up Oobleck, and I'd have preferred a few of you actually had the common damn decency to die but hey, that's what I'm here for." He then slammed his palm against the crystals container and the weight surged again, slamming them all deeper into the stone.

"Cooper, why!?!" Oobleck cried, pushing himself up on his Fire-staff which quickly began to sink into the stone.

"Why? Come on, Oobleck don't be stupid," Cooper said with a wave of his free hand. "You'd want to study this, put it in a museum or some crap or maybe give it to the Council. There's so little money in that it's not funny," he scoffed. "But on the black market, hah, now there's a market for Dust there and one this size will fetch me a fortune. But thing was, when I got here that King Tajitu was coiled around it, must-a understood it was important. Hehe, guess I didn't register as important enough to attack, maybe it knew I'd call more people?" he asked, though he didn't sound curious.

"Whatever the case, I needed you, and preferably only you to, hey-!" he shouted as each of the Hunters rose to their feet.

But just as they'd gotten over their surprise, and pushed passed the strange intensity of the weight and readied to charge Cooper threw out his free hand and the Hunters found themselves hurdled backwards by an invisible force. He then raised his hand in a grand gesture and each of them was lifted into the air. Their bodies thrashing against the absence of anything thing only for their Aura's to flare defensively as Cooper piled on more and more pressure to crush in on their side, pressing down on their chests and backs like a vice.

"You big city Hunters are idiots, bet ya thought I didn't have Semblance didn't ya?" he asked, smirking up at them. "But I do, lets me fly softly as a cloud, or more, to levitate myself and other things a bit if I wanna. It was good for following ya'll without your pet overhearing."

"Shut your mouth you prick!" Yang shouted, the raging energy from her bout with the King Tajjitu still enhancing her power Yang lashed out with a punch but with a sharp wave of his hands Cooper sent the flaming bullets off course and into the floor.

"Uuhh, mind yer manners girl," he said wagging a finger.

"So its just about money then, that's it?" Weiss seethed.

Cooper shrugged, "I've been selling shit on the side for years," he then turned to Oobleck.

"Lost artefacts, treasures of the past, mementos," Cooper listed off, practically spitting his words. "All sold if I could, did some scouting for the SDC sometimes, always looking out for more beasties to drag into the quarries they are," he said, nodding towards Blake and the Faunus felt her stomach churn as her body flickered and thrashed against his hold. Off to the side Yang continued her own struggle against the ever tightening hold, feeling her Aura surge against the weight.
Cooper barely seemed to register Blake's fury or the Huntresses struggles as he simply flicked the Faunus's hood off with a quick wave of his hand and grinned as he said, "I should than-ye Oobleck, you took out that there Grimm and brought me two such nice finds. See I'll be taking the Miss over there, if I can," Cooper said, nodding towards Weiss. "I hear there's quite a bounty on her, and a goodly sized one on the cat too."

"I'll tell everyone what you did!" Weiss threatened, "I'll use everything I have to destroy you!"

"Please," he scoffed, rough voicing rising high as he seemed to try and repress a laugh. "No one's gonna believe you, or care that I did away with some Hunters in the wilds. Shit," he said jovially, a wide smirk on his face, "Having found this White Fang with you, I bet they wouldn't believe you were even in your right mind, you're clearly just lying or hallucinating."

Forgotten by their captor Yang let out a deep ragged pant as her chest began to boil and burn, her eyes taking on a shining crimson hue.

Ignorant or uncaring of the blondes obvious fury Cooper turned back to Oobleck Cooper said, "This really is a good day Oobleck, you got me Dust, two bounties and all I need to to do is bury three tuckered out Hunters and some of you already have one foot inside the grave, hah, what a wind fall! No more rooting around in the wilds looking for my next meal, no more working for stuffed shirts who think piles of shit are fascinating! I could-a retired on the Dust alone, but this is even better!"

"You spied on us, made sure the Grimm knew were coming with your prank," Blake snapped.

"You re-armed the traps!" Ruby shouted.

"Yep, all me, lotta work too mind," Cooper said, his voice muting as he seemingly lost interest in the conversations and he squeezed his hand tighter, applying more and more pressure, enough to make Weiss let out a gasp.

Yang's hair was shining and she felt her blood thundering in her ears, almost drowning out his words as her skin began to burn and her muscles pulsed and swelled with new energy, her Aura flared, golden energy spreading to her hair causing it ti ripple and whip like a growing fire.

"Cooper how dare, you," Oobleck spat, "Have you no respect for these Huntresses lives, for morality, for our worlds history!"

"Spare me man," Cooper said with a roll of his head and eyes. "Who cares if a bunch-a animals built a box-town, got scared when the kingdoms tore through the wilds, and the Grimm wiped out the underground while no one was the wiser. Ya know what that means to me?" he asked, angling his head and giving Oobleck a hard stern glare as he continued, "Jack, shit," he said slowly. "Well, save that all that Dust it got m-"

Cooper froze as a deep snarl rattled throughout the chamber. The treasure hunters head whipped around searching for the Grimm only to zero in on Yang, the blondes hair was shining gold, it was brighter than any of them had seen before. Her red eyes shone against the emerald light of the Dust Crystal, so bright and deep, they were like a Grimm's. Fire rippled around her, sparks crackling in the air as an aura of fire spread around her body. Gnashing her teeth and quaking with rage Yang growled, it was deep and low, but so strong it sent a tremor through the air and into the stone.
"Your first!" Cooper shouted. Throwing his free hand forward everyone else felt the weight on their bodies lessen, but as Cooper made a crushing gesture and the crystal hissed as its power was brought to bare upon his target like a tidal wave, Yang threw out her arms and- was it a roar, a scream?

It was impossible to say.

All anyone knew was that it rippled through the air like a physical force and shook the chamber to its foundations.

Yang shone, she burned in the air, unleashing a shock wave of power that sent the others flying away as fire surged around her like a blazing tornado. Falling from the air Yang dropped to the chamber floor with a thud. The ground beneath her feet began to sizzle, crack and melt as heat filled the chamber.

She could feel her blood pumping so hard the veins swelled up all across her body feeling like stretched steel wire. Her hair was writhing around her like it had a mind of its own. Her muscles spasmed, swelling so much that her skin felt like it would burst, save that it had turned harder than steel or stone. The fire swelled inside her and was escaping her lips like from a raging blast furnace. Chest heaving and moth agape Yang cracked her knuckles and stomped forward, each stride shaking the chamber and spreading a new wave of magma beneath her feet.

"What kind of freak are you!?" Cooper bellowed. He threw his hand out and Yang felt another wave of pressure crash against her. It was like drowning and being constricted all at once. Just like the King Tajitu's mouth but stronger, but she welcomed it, her Semblance flaring as the pressure crashed against her again and she-

"Hah," Yang growled, fire spilling from her lips.

"Stop, stop you bitch, what the fuck is this!?!" Cooper screamed, forsaking crushing her all together Cooper just wanted the girl gone. He unleashed a blast of gravitational energy at the golden inferno in a desperate bid to force her back.

Something slammed against her like a wave or a harsh wind, but it barely slowed her, and each step brought Yang closer to the quivering brown outline before her. His words barely registered, only the outline of her hated foe mattered, that was all she needed to destroy him. Her blood sang in rage as she marched towards him.

Oobleck called out to Cooper, "I believe my dear treasure hunter that you triggered Miss Xiao Longs Semblance. If I recall her file correctly, whenever she is wounded her Semblance will generate energy, allowing her grow in power from the strike to fight back. As a mere, stuffed shirt, I could be wrong, but I'd venture your initial attempts to crush her were insufficient to harm her or reduce Miss Xiao Longs Aura, but still strong enough to enhance her already active Semblance, and now, well," Oobleck shrugged. "It seems you've created a feedback loop where she's too strong to hurt and yet getting stronger with every attempt you make to crush her. Fascinating really."

Cooper's shaking only grew as he tried to process what he was being told, "Get away!" Cooper screamed, he threw his hands forward and the crystal screeched as he pulled on everything he had.

Yang felt the world around her fading, and something gentle lifting her into the air. "No," she snarled. Yang brought her hands together and in one swift hard clap she broke the air and sent a
shock wave outwards. Gravities hold shattered and Cooper wailed as he was hurled to his back and sent screeching across the ground.

Yang slammed her feet into the stone floor and in a few quick strides was standing over the frantic man as he flailed and shouted. Cooper levelled his pistols at her, each shot plinking harmlessly off her armoured skin if it survived her blazing Aura at all.

"Stop, please!" Cooper wailed, as Yang practically crushed his shoulder and leg in her grip as she lifted him above her head, her every instinct screaming at her to slam him down and break him. 'Ruby's watching, the others are here,' Some sane part of her mind called out from within, lancing through her furious mind even as Cooper frantically thrashed against her grasp, his clothes already sizzling under her touch.

"GRAAAAH!" Yang shouted, her body quaked with unspent fury as her power beat against her insides, begging to be released so intensely it hurt. She dragged Cooper down and slammed the man onto her knee and fire exploded in the air as Cooper let out a cry of pain before gagging as his Aura broke. Yang let whatever force was left in her strike throw the man away from her, sending him crashing to the floor where he began gasping and wheezing.

Yang let out a deep ragged breath, her chest sunk and rose as she heaved, taking a few quick steps away from Coopers downed form.

"Yang!" Ruby cried, but as she tried to run to her sisters side, Oobleck's hand came down hard on her shoulder though and the Huntsmen pulled her back.

Yang's body shone like gold as her Aura blazed and thrashed like an out of control wild fire. Sparks spewed from her mouth as she reared back, muscle and bone stretching, pulsing and contorting unnaturally.

Yang's scream was a terrible thing. Neither a shriek not a roar but some horrible amalgamation that tore into their ears like a blade and burned its presence into the air as she threw her head back.

Ruby clutched her ears and quailed at the sound as she felt the force of it smack against her like a explosive wave. Looking towards her sister she saw Yang panting and gasping for breath as fire spewed from her lips, "I can't- Its too much! I'm burning!" Yang screamed, her screams more like desperate snarls than words.

"We need to get her out of here and somewhere she can unleash the energy. Ruby with me!" Oobleck ordered, dragging her forward.

They shot forwards, each of them slinging an arm each under Yang's own, she stung to touch but they pushed that aside and they dragged Yang away in an instant, leaving a trail of burning stone in their wake as Blake and Weiss were left alone in the sweltering chamber, too stunned to move.

"She'll be OK... right?" Weiss asked.

Blake remained silent, amber eyes turning to Cooper's shuddering body as the man hugged himself and wretched on the floor. Blake's fingers tightened on Gambol Shroud, 'Your fault, its your fault she's hurting, if she- if she dies...'

"Blake!" Weiss hissed, her eyes shaking as she looked around frantically.
"I don't know if she'll be OK," Blake growled, "I-"

Yang's voice was like a demonic echo, louder than the King Taijitu's bellow, her roar shook the city to its core. Above their heads explosions rang out and the roar of flames so strong their heat could be felt even deep within the Morius catacombs.

"Earthquake!?" Weiss shrieked.

"More like an avalanche!" Blake said as another explosion ripped through the air.

"This whole place is already unstable, it could collapse," Blake said, casting her gaze at the roof as shrapnel and dust began raining down on them and the roar of tumbling stone grew louder in Blake's ears.

"The crystal, we can use it to try and repel some of the damage, Blake help me," Weiss said.

In a flash both Huntresses hands were planted on the controls and they let their Aura's flow into the machine. The energy flooded the crystal causing it to sing sharply as its power was sent surging through the framework of Morius.

The shaking grew louder and louder all around them.

"Ah!" Blake cried as she poured more and more of her power into the Crystal. Her body shining with a dark violet light as shadows and spectral afterimages flashed through Morius's halls.

Weiss grit her teeth, chest tightening, her heart feeling like it was trapped in a vice. 'More, give it more, more!' She ordered herself, and all across Morius Glyphs began to spring up, further reinforcing the cities foundations.

Another tremor ran through the city, accompanied by one last ragged, parched scream from Yang.

Both Huntresses shuddered as they slid to their knees, panting in exhaustion, but their eyes turned skyward in worry.

"She'll be OK," Blake finally sighed, "Yang's Semblance is strong, but there are others like it..."

"Well say that before I worry myself sick," Weiss spat, halfheartedly.

Heavy boots clapped against the stone floor and a shadow began to loom over Weiss. Cooper spat out a gob of blood, his one remaining pistol lowering to Weiss's head he said, "Freeze there m-

There was a rush of air and Cooper found two blades at his throat, the tip of Weiss's sword and the sharp flat edge of Blake's cleaver.

"Wh- wha?" He stammered.

"We're not as weak as you," both spat, before Blake slammed her fist into the side of Cooper's head and he fell to the ground with a thud.

Slowly rising to their feet, legs straining against the effort both Huntresses were greeted by a surge of air signifying Oobleck's return. "Ah excellent, you're both alive, well, and have not only kept
Cooper down but even preserved the city, come, come, we mustn't tarry!" He said, slinging Cooper over his shoulder and grabbing both Huntresses by the hand.

Blake was actually relieved that she'd experienced this before as Oobleck dragged them up the elevator shaft.

"I'll tell everyone," Cooper spat, glaring up at the Hunters who loomed over him in Morius's ruined streets. He was on his backside staring up a them, his Aura worn down to a nub, his belly empty and his options few.

"Tell everyone what? That you're a murderous jerk!" Ruby snapped.

"Yeah..." came Yang's muffled cry from where her face was buried Ruby's shoulder, the older fighter was hung limply on her sisters back, her hair was a ragged mess with burnt tips, her outfit reeked of smoke and her skin look like she'd been left in the sun to cook for days.

"I'll tell them where the Schnee girl is," Cooper said, his voice and sweat belying his nerves. "I'll tell them you're all working with a wanted criminal! So let me go or everyone will hear at my trial," he spat the last word as forcefully as he could. "You little bints won't get away with it, I tell ya that, shouldn't even be tryin-a punish me, there ain't no laws out here!"

"Yes but there are laws in the kingdoms and I thankfully have recorded evidence," Oobleck interrupted, with a lazy wave of his Scroll.

"And out these little girls?" Cooper asked.

"Huntresses," Ruby corrected.

"An interesting conundrum, Miss Schnee, Miss Belladonna, your thoughts on the matter?" Oobleck said, almost jocularly.

Hand upon her chest Weiss, in her most lady-like voice said, "I think he sounds like a bitter criminal making excuses."

"Oh definitely," Blake said with a nod, "if anything they'll just think he's crazy, I mean a Schnee, working with a White Fang? He's obviously making it all up, or outright delusional."

"And conveniently my recording names no names and shows no faces, save yours Cooper," Oobleck said. "And the confidentially clause I signed going into business with 'The Knights Errant' protects their identities provided they do not wish to come forward." Oobleck pushed his spectacles up and continued, "Frankly, what I have hear is, well more than enough. I imagine Headmaster Ozpin can help push things through as well, he's been giving the head of the SDC the run around for the last few months after all. A little thing like you, well," Oobleck said slowly, firmly, almost coldly, "You won't even be a blip on their radar, my friend."

Cooper's mouth opened and closed, as he tried to work out more words only for his eyes to widen and then go dull as he slumped down against the wall.

"Well then," Oobleck said, "I believe that is everything young Huntresses! My transport will be here in a day or so and I can keep Cooper bound easily enough, why I'll even be able to go over over all my notes and recite them at the same time!" he enthused, drawing a depressed groan from the
downed treasure hunter between them. Gesturing to their group Oobleck continued, "Miss Xiao Long should recover soon and your pay, including hazard pay for my erstwhile employees grossly inappropriate behaviour is already being transferred."

"So... that's it?" Blake asked as she and Weiss moved to Ruby's side. They'd offered to carry Yang but the youngest member of their team had steadfastly refused.

"Well Morius will now be opened for investigation and I believe Headmaster Ozpin will be able to claim jurisdiction. Thus we can ensure that what is left of this city, and its former inhabitants, are treated with respect. Everything will be recorded and cared for, I promise," he swore.

"Thank you, Doctor Oobleck," Blake said haltingly. "And I know it might be strange but-

"But I shall look into the burial rituals and ensure the bones are taken care of as well, your concern and respect does you credit Miss Belladonna," Oobleck offered.

He held out his hand to shake and without a moments hesitation Blake clasped his hand and they both shook, small smiles on their faces.

Weiss said her good byes next, "What can I say doctor? This was an... educational experience, and you were an excellent contractor," she said, shaking the mans hand.

"And you were an excellent team, thank you for your services and resolve," Oobleck said proudly.

Ruby, along with Yang limply bumping hands with the doctor, was the most straightforward, "Thanks for hiring us Doctor Oobleck, maybe we'll see you again some day!"

"I am certain we will meet again Young Huntresses, and I'll recommend your services to anyone I know I can trust, safe travels!" He called as the Knights Errant began their track back down the mountain.

As they disappeared around a corner he distantly heard Yang mumble, "Guys... I think I broke Ember Celica..."

Only half listening to Ruby's oath that they would use the money to rebuild her sisters weapons bigger and better then ever, Oobleck's hands blurred over his Scroll and he flicked through the screens and opened a file that read 'Report: The Knights Errant'. Within were folders that read: Ruby Rose, Weiss Schnee, Blake Belladonna and Yang Xiao Long.

'You certainly don't want to leave things to chance, do you Headmaster?' Oobleck thought as he began typing.

"Guys, seriously I'm feeli-, umph!" Yang scoffed as Ruby used a pair of chop stick to jam another mouthful of Blake's noodles between her lips whilst Weiss re-fluffed one of her pillows and checked her blanket.

"No ifs, not buts, no coconuts Yang, you're on bed rest for the week," Ruby insisted.

"Doctors orders even," Weiss said, grinning as her joke managed to yield a chuckle from her
friends, Weiss pulled out a battered blue comb from their travelling bags and went to work on Yang's hair, mindful of the burnt tips.

"And the best part is Yang, we can afford it, so you don't need to stress," Blake said as she flopped down next to her friend, on the opposing side to Ruby, and more importantly, Zwei. "Drink?" Blake offered.

Yang sniffed a little and with a weak wave of her hand she wiped her eyes, "You guys."

Grinning cheekily Ruby leaned forward, more food between her chopsticks as she said, "Remember Yang, the faster you feel better the sooner The Knights Errant go on their newest awesome adventure."

Yang smiled as she gulped down some of the tea Blake had brewed her and turned to the noodles Ruby was offering. "I'll have to hurry then, but for now, heh, guess I'll enjoy your guys TLC," Yang said.

They'd all need to be ready, after all, who knew where their adventure would take them next?

Chapter End Notes

And thus Raucous Ruins comes to a close, I hope this was a satisfying ending to a hopefully enjoyable arc in the teams adventures. As always I'd like to thank Person With Many Aliases on SB for beta reading and advice and to everyone who's read, followed, liked, faved, and reviewed! Oh and a quick thank you goes out to xT-Zealot, the idea of Yang's Semblance turning on her and fire coming out of her mouth was inspired by one of their stories 'Burnout' which I highly recommend.

If you have any questions, comments or critiques please feel free to leave a comment and I'll get back to you as soon as possible.

As to what comes next, I have a JNPR/CFVY snippet planned, have an outline for the next arc and at least a sort of... promo I guess, already written, though I'm afraid that beyond planning to publish the JNOR/CFVY snippet next week I can't offer much of a schedule.

The idea of someone using Gravity Dust or a similar sort of Semblance an inadvertently buffing Yang has been an idea I've entertained pretty much since I found out how her Semblance worked, I don't go for the "she has no limits" idea because that would be too broken, but that under the right circumstances Yang can get some very crazy boosts such as in this situation, though with a cost. (This situation is not one that she could easily recreate though, not without expending a lot of money anyway)

I hope the explanation worked and didn't seem to forced within the text itself, but yeah it basically worked as Oobleck said, Yang had already gotten a boost when she was eaten and the pressure Cooper applied (at first) wasn't enough to really lower her Aura
but it was still force being applied to her thus it fed into her Semblance, and once
Cooper did try putting all the pressure on, she was already too strong for him to really
hurt so the loss in Aura was minimal compared to the Semblance born increase in
power. Oh, and on possibly destroying Morius, that was in part because the city itself
is standing on foundations of sand at this point and they are very high in a mountain.

Anyway thanks for reading, I hope its been a fun experience!
As the sun began its slow descent over the horizon, Beacon Academy was shaded in a mellow orange glow, as the academy's students gathered in the grand mess hall to combat a hunger fostered in them since their lunch and through hours of rigorous school work.

Pyrrha glanced around the hall as she joined her team and CFVY at what had become 'their' table. "Things certainly seem quieter this evening," she said, placing her bowl of salad on the table as she took her seat.

"This place always gets quiet on a Friday," Fox said from across Pyrrha where he nursed a bowl of soup.

"Hey yeah!" Jaune said, suddenly enthused, he waved his hands and said, "Its Friday, Friday night!"

"And?" Fox asked, "It was Friday last week and it will be next week."

"Barring a spectacular calendar malfunction," Velvet cut in.

"Or a meteor," Yatsuhashi added, the duo summoning a small chuckle from the rest of the table.

"Ooh yeah!" Nora said before gasping, "Or like, we all get sucked into a parallel world where Friday isn't Friday but instead its Tuesday and its always thirteen oh clock!" Nora said, before slurping down her strawberry-mint milkshake. Before anyone else could speak though Nora waved her hands at Pyrrha and Velvet's meals and snorted disapprovingly. "What have I told you two, salads alone aren't a full meal, don't make me, make Ren, make you macaroni and cheese at midnight again," she said.

"It was only once," Pyrrha said hurriedly. What could she say, it had been a long day and whatever one might say about Ren's health drinks, usually something along the lines of "Uurrg, blah!" the man knew how to cook.

"Not the point here guys," Jaune said, half groaning in frustration as he tried to drag the conversation back on course. "I mean, I'm just saying we're young, we're cool, we've had long week what with four different histories professors-

"I never knew Ozpin had met so many interesting historical figures, or that they'd tried to stiff each other on the bill," Yatsuashi cut in.

"But its Friday we should go do something, something fun, exciting, and awesome!" Jaune cried, plowing through any potential interruptions.

Raising a designer gloved hand Coco said, "Jauney boy, normally I'd be all over that suggestion, but tonight is not the night we eight tear up the town I'm afraid." Ignoring Jaune's 'aw' of disappointment Coco rose to her feet, held her glass up high and tapped it with her fork. "For tonight I have an announcement. After a week of negotiations, running errands and possibly
signing away someone's first born child, team CFVY not only has a mission, but we have the mission!

"You mean!?" Velvet squealed.

"That's right, we have been hired for the Elite Guard Mission starting tomorrow, so who's ready to enjoy some high yield money, sound off!" Coco cheered, accompanied by her team either cheering or slamming their fists on the table. And Nora letting out a happy whoop, but that was simply Nora as far as Pyrrha was concerned.

"That is wonderful Coco, missions like that rarely ever go to Second Years," Pyrrha said.

"Yep, but when you're the best of the best it only makes sense to hire us over the rest," Coco said, grinning happily as she patted her combat purse. "Tell ya what guys, this mission goes well we'll take you all out dancing next weekend, my treat," Coco said.

Pyrrha tried to beat back a blush as Coco sent her a wink then motioned to the cheering Jaune at her side. 'How does she knows!?'

With the next day being a Saturday and CFVY set to leave before the sun even rose JNPR had opted to do homework and after several hours of training that left Jaune nearly passed out on his bed, finished off with a movie night. Seeing their seniors off for what would likely be a dull, if very profitable mission was in Coco's own words 'Sweet, but a waste of time'.

Naturally this meant that barring Pyrrha who couldn't sleep past seven even when she actively tried JNPR were only just dusting off breakfast at ten in the morning.

"So ah, practise time I guess?" Jaune asked, having noticed they were slowly making their way to one of the sparring arena's scattered around Beacon.

Nodding Pyrrha said, "We'll start on some stamina building exercises and observation- oh my," Pyrrha gasped, as Dove Bronzewing hurtled through the sky and came crashing down in the grass before them.

"That freaking blind bastard!" he spat, before slamming his weapon into the ground and charging back towards the open area arena.

"So ah, does anyone else know any other blind Huntsmen in training?" Jaune asked with a nervous chuckle.

"No, lets go see what's going on," Ren said.

It took only a few second for them to round on the arena where Fox stood in his dark orange and brown battle uniform, his bladed arm bands glinting in the morning sun. His scarred body was in a low fighting pose as Dove, Cardin and Sky rushed at him in a triangle formation. Unsurprisingly it wasn't enough, while decent fighters in their own right CDRL were simply no match for Fox.

Sliding back on his feet and sweeping Dove's halberd from its own Fox jammed the weapon into the blondes gut then launched Sky over him and into the floor. Using the Halberd to redirect Card's mace Fox spun around and below Sky's sword swing before flicking his legs out, sweeping both
fighters off their feet. In a blur Fox delivered a double palmed strike to Cardin's side so powerful the ground around them shattered before the brunette was sent hurtling away with an echoing shout. Before Sky could even rise to his feet Fox swept the ground out from under him again before spinning kicking Sky in the stomach and launching him out of the arena as well.

"See, that's why I didn't join in," Russel said from off to the side as he helped a grumbling and wobbly Dove to his feet.

Fox simply marched back to the centre of the stone arena and gave his audience, some two dozen students if Pyrrha guessed right, an impassive look. "Who's next?"

"I think we should maybe speak to somebody else?" Jaune said quickly as two more students rushed up to test their mettle.

Glancing at her leader Pyrrha then looked back at Fox for a moment, an almost unfamiliar tingling running just under her skin, 'I could fight him, it would be an excellent battle, we would... No that's not what we're here for,' Pyrrha reminded herself, dragging herself away from the one sided battle going on and following her team.

Jaune decided the next most likely place to look would be the CFVY dorm rooms, however...

"Damn, arrogant piece of shit!" Coco roared, followed by the sound of something metal clanging against the wall.

"Maybe we should just call Velvet," Pyrrha suggested, as both she and Jaune stared at the small crack in Beacon's reinforced walls with some trepidation.

'Jaune?' Velvet asked through the Scroll, her voice crisp and clear over the speaker phone.

"And the rest of JNPR!" Nora said.

"Yeah, sorry I got you on speaker," Jaune said quickly.

'It's fine,' Velvet answered, she wasn't shouting, nor did she even sound like she was crying. However there was a tired numbness to the Faunus girl's tone that worried Jaune and he could see his concern reflected in his team.

"So, ah," Jaune stammered, running his hand through his hair, "Mind telling us where you are? We saw Coco and Fox but they didn't um, chatty and I can't even guess where Yatsuhashi is."

'He's probably meditating on the roof or the Emerald Forest,' Velvet answered. 'I'm near the air-docks-'

"Great we'll be down there in a minute and uh, be careful OK and um, don't do anything rash," Jaune said frantically.

'I'm just reading the news Jaune,' was Velvet's answer.

One rapid jog later, that left Jaune feeling much more puffed than he'd have liked trying to keep up with his team and they were at Beacon's air docks. 'But hey, I didn't get a stitch this time,' he
thought. Sucking in a breath Jaune looked over the wide circular metal docks that rested on the edge of the mountains overlooking Vale. Velvet's distinctive ears stood out clearly as the Faunus girl leaned against a nearby railing, Scroll in hand.

Slowly sliding up to Velvet's side Jaune and his friends saw the Faunus girls tight expression and slightly flushed cheeks. They all exchanged uncertain looks before Nora simply flung herself at Velvet, causing her to let out a shriek at Nora's hug as the redhead cried, "Who do we need to beat up!?

"N- Nora," Velvet stammered as she slipped from the shorter Huntresses hug. "Its just, it... The mission didn't go well," Velvet said with a sigh, arms dropping to her sides.

"We determined that much, we just don't understand why," Ren asked, meeting Velvet's gaze with his own hard stare.

Biting her lip Velvet flicked over her Scroll and Jaune found himself competing with Nora, Ren and Pyrrha to see the title of the article their friends was read.

"White Fang Determined as Culprits in a Seven Different Dust Thefts"

Four sets of eyes turned to Velvet as she pocketed her Scroll and sighed, "Once the contractor got a look at my ears, well..." she shrugged, "They said that they'd prefer a team with a more well known background for reliability."

"Shouldn't they have know who they were hiring?" Pyrrha asked.

"Sometimes," Velvet shrugged, "all the contractor said was they wanted whatever team Beacon recommended, they didn't need anything else. In a lot of missions only the result matters, sometimes the one paying won't even see the Hunters just the results."

"So... your teams mad at you?" Jaune asked, it was such an absurd concept given how protective they could be yet still...

Velvet's ears shot up with an almost whip-like crack. Waving her hands she said, "What? No, no, they were very understanding and didn't blame me or anything... Like always," She added bitterly.

"Wouldn't that be... good?" Jaune asked.

"Not when I just end up causing problems like this," Velvet said.

"But its not your fault!" Nora shouted, grasping Velvet's shoulders, just barely stopping short of shaking the taller Huntress.

"I know its not, but that doesn't mean I like making things harder on the rest of CFVY just being here," Velvet said, chewing the inside of her cheeks. "I knew they were upset, Coco especially, her and my weapons take a lot of money to maintain. With all the spikes in Dust prices and those rumours about Ozpin bickering with the SDC maintenance has been a bit more of... a bother lately. Even if Beacon's meant to help us maintain our weapons that won't help us save up, or ensure we get the highest quality parts and Beacon can only supply standard equipment." Looking down Velvet continued, "This mission would have been good for us so I figured I'd give them all some space and, well then you guys showed up."
"And we're sticking around!" Nora cheered, "But not here, we're going out, to the big city, the place where the action is, the-

"Arcade!?" Jaune said happily.

"That's right!" Nora enthused, pointing a finger at Jaune, "Lets turn our frowns upside down with some fun and games!" Nora said, slipping her hand into Velvet's own and dragging the older girl along.

"It- its fine you don't have to do this," Velvet said.

"Of course we don't, we want to," Pyrrha said softly.

"Yeah, you're our friend after all," Jaune added.

"Indeed," Ren added.

"Hey, stop piggybacking on my awesome idea guys and lets get on the air-bus!" Nora shouted, before breaking into a run.

As the five Hunters in training strolled down the bustling streets of Vale, with signs saying 'Vytal Festival Coming Soon!' or some variation, seemingly on every second street corner, Nora filled the air with her usual friendly chatter. "You're gonna love this place, the owner can be a bit cranky sometimes-"

"You did break his whack-a-Grimm machine," Ren cut in.

"But I still got my prize, ah here we are!" Nora said, waving towards the sturdy brown bricked building. Even with the popularity of online and Scroll games, arcades still had much to offer and were common group pass times.

Velvet let out a sudden, shrill little hiccup and a second later her Scroll buzzed to life. In a blurred movement, as Nora stood, frozen in the midst of pushing the singing glass door open, Velvet pulled her Scroll out.

"Oh goodness, I am so sorry guys, Coco's called in a Code Blue," Velvet said hurriedly.

"What's a Code Blue, wait was that in the leadership manual I didn't get, do I need to know what that is?" Jaune asked.

"Its a Coco thing," Velvet aid, already pocketing her phone and jogging in place. "Sorry it means she wants to speak with everyone, right now, I'll have to take a rain check on the Arcade, but you guys have fun, thanks for inviting me, bye!" She cried, before leaping into the air and onto a nearby rooftop and disappearing down the street.

"That was rather... sudden," Pyrrha said, seemingly unsure of her words.

"She faked a text," Nora muttered, a tense, roughness to her words unfamiliar to all of her team save one.
"Why would Velvet do that... Oh," Jaune said, as he looked over to where Nora stood, glaring with her fists clenched.

In the window next to the door was an inconspicuous piece of white paper. It sat on level with the bright and cheery 'welcome!' sign, but showed a cartoonish head with antlers, ears and spiky teeth and read 'No Faunus'.

Teeth grinding together, a sharp crackling buzz reverberated from the Huntress as Nora drew back her fist and-

"Nora stop," Ren snapped.

Nora's fist stalled on its collision path towards the window.

"Breaking it won't make him let Velvet or anyone else in. At best nothing will change, at worst you make the problem worse," Ren continued.

A small, savage little twitch developed in Nora's left eye as she squeezed her fist tighter, and tighter and- she dropped it back, spun on her heels and shouted, "Well I won't be playing here again!"

Her team and even a few passerby's started in shock as Nora marched off, "Bad service, cheating games, and my prize had a rat on it! Come on guys lets go!" She said, waving for her friends to follow.

Jaune folded his hands behind his head and said, "Yeah the games were junk anyway."

"And we never did get that meal we paid for," Ren added.

Pyrrha just glared at the store before turning up her nose and marching away from the arcade and back to Beacon Academy.

As JNPR marched down the halls of Beacon's second year dormitories Nora muttered to herself. "I can't believe we never noticed that sign before!

"I suppose we never had a reason to, we weren't going to be thrown out after all," Pyrrha said.

"Its easy to miss things in that context," Ren said.

"Yeah well if the White Fang are robbing people I hope they knock over his stupid arcade, I'm glad I saved pink 'Fuzz Bear the Third' from that stupid store!" Nora said, throwing her arms into the air.

"That's going a bit far Nora," Ren said.

"Except for the bit about the bear," Pyrrha said, perhaps trying to soothe Nora's mood.

"I hope Velvet's OK at least," was Jaune's own contribution to the discussion.

"Well I suppose we'll see," Ren said, as they rounded on CFVY's dorm.
Needing not invitation Nora simply twisted the nob and strode in.

"Oh, guys!" Velvet said, head shooting up from her bed and the light of her Scroll illuminating her face.

"Sup kids," Coco said, waving lazily from her desk.

Fox and Yatsuhashi mumbled or smiled in greeting from their positions leaning against the window and their far too small chair respectively.

"Uh, hey guys, just wanted to make sure you weren't to, ah, bummed still," Jaune said.

"We had time, we're calm now," Fox said.

"The bin won't be getting fixed anytime soon though," Yatsuhashi said, motioning towards a warped mass of thin embedded in the wall.

"Look, I'm not paying for a replacement, our former contractor can," was Coco's reasoned and mature reply.

"I'd love to see that court case," Velvet said, chuckling as she slid up to meet JNPR at something close to eye level. "I told the others what you tried to do for me, thanks again," she said, bowing a little as she spoke.

"Hey, uh, no problem, and maybe next time we won't pick such a crappy place to visit," Jaune said.

"Well we're making one now," Coco said, waving her Scroll, and flashing upon its holographic screen was text that read, 'Epic Party Plans'.

"I don't think I understand," Pyrrha said slowly.

"Word came down about ten minutes ago, Old Ozpin's decided to put us in charge this dance we're having cos of the Vytal Festival," Fox said, snorting and rolling his eyes. "I'm in charge of the music and food tasting."

"It should be lots of fun, would you guys like to make any requests!" Velvet said cheerily, waving them inside.

Nora squealed and rushed to Velvet's side, slinging her arm around the Faunus and grinning as she said, "You're the best!"

"Ah is this dance black tie by any chance?" Jaune asked, as Pyrrha closed the door behind them.

"You could wear a suit, a dress, robes or a clown suit so long as it looks nice," Coco said. Holding up her Scroll as her fingers danced across the base she hummed and said, "I can see you pulling off a nice little cocktail dress I have here."

Rubbing his chin as he dropped down next to Pyrrha on one of CFVY's beds Jaune said, "Well, I do have the hips for it."

The two teams quickly fell into a rapt discussion of party themes outfit ideas, their previous
troubles falling to the wayside as they relaxed in one another's company.

Chapter End Notes

And that was the CFVY/JNPR snippet, I hope it was an interesting/enjoyable read, as always I have to thank Person With Many Aliases for their help and everyone who has reviewed, faved or followed this story.

Also, in regards to the Dust price spike, its not just Papa Schnee spiting Ozpin, though that is definitely part of it, but he also has a technical justification thanks to a few high seas White Fang raids, then there's local retailers doing their own gouging, but yes some part of it is him trying to screw over Ozpin for, in Papa Schnee's view "letting" Weiss get away and or not detaining her for his minions. The gouging isn't crazy severe like "I can't afford to run my car" bad, but its enough that it's like a dollar a few dollars more for everything based on "hazard pay" and "Difficulties in transit".

In terms of timeline its been about three/four months since the start of the semester new students should be arriving relatively soon, however Roman and the White Fang are behind on their Dust thefts as a byproduct of what happened during the first arc. Near the end of that story Junior referenced one of Roman's warehouses being uncovered and him being out on the run by Glynda Goodwitch.

The basic idea here is that while he and Neo escaped they lost more than a few of the warehouses they'd been prepping for Dust theft and with the high alert of the White Fang discovered in the docks there was a lot of searching and increased security measures which put their ability to sneak the White Fang in, let alone beginning robberies, back by a decent margin so they're only just picking up now and it will be awhile before they are ready for anything as large as say the Dock heist or stealing Paladins.
During her time with the White Fang Blake had rarely had the chance to pilot. She'd learnt how as was necessary for anyone who moved camps as often as she did. Adam however... He'd always like to be the one flying, or if not that he'd have someone else do it.

Now however, Blake had somehow become the Knights Errant unofficial pilot. Yang knew the basics but only from reading the manual and a few practise runs she'd insisted on 'just in case'. As to the rest of their odd little team, Ruby only knew about the guns and ships armour and Weiss... She'd been surprisingly enthusiastic to learn. Maybe it was a chance for control, or a feeling of freedom, Blake couldn't speak to the other Huntresses intentions. 'Though there is something liberating at feeling the ground and gravity give way at the push of a lever,' she thought.

Whatever the case it was what had led to their current situation. Throughout the Bullhead's front window Blake could see only blue, the skies bled into the horizon and joined with the rippling ocean. The grey panelled console before her was calm, all the gauges were shining as they were supposed to, or dim how they were meant to be. Yet Blake couldn't shake the feeling the whole ship was about to head straight in for a nose dive and leave them in the ocean between Mistral and Vale. Admittedly the fishing had been good and Bullheads had fail safes for the waters... But this fear was beyond such petty concerns or logical defences.

"Now just be gentle, gentle, on the throttle," Blake said, her voice swifter and higher than normal. She slipped her own rough hands around Weiss's and grasped the lever with her. "Don't take your eyes of the sky-way, but remember to watch the scanners."

"Isn't that the co-pilots job?" Yang cut in from the back of the cockpit where she leaned against the wall and watched them with a grin. Ruby and Zwei were at her sides on a box of looted ammo watching with glee.

"I am keeping an eye on them," Blake ground out, amber eyes flicking to the read outs. 'Nothing incoming, altitude lower than normal but that was my idea, we're still stable, fuel is fine, the winds are-

Weiss, seemingly numb or indifferent to Blake's grasp pulled back on the lever. The ship tilted and they began to climb, the Bullhead began to thrum with energy and Blake's eyes flashed to the throttle.

"Weiss," She said slowly.

"Relax Blake, you've shown me everything a dozen times," Weiss said. The sparkle in her eyes and the smile on her lips were odd, not that she never smiled, but she was reminding Blake of Ruby when the girl was testing out a weapons mod.

"Weiss we can't climb too fast these ships aren't meant to transport so much loose equipment it could go-

"I know, I know, I have flown before, if not a Bullhead, or as the pilot," she mumbled. "I just want us out of this airway and a bit higher, look I'm levelling out, see, see," she practically chirped.

"You're doing great Weiss, this is so cool!" Ruby cheered, accompanied by Zwei barking excitably
like the ignorant animal he was, completely numb to the danger they were all in.

"We-" Blake started, a bit more gently as she began to reach for the throttle only for Yang's warmth radiating hand to come down on her shoulder.

Leaning near Blake's feline ears Yang said, "Ease up, she knows what she's doing, just give her a chance Blake. She'll never learn to fly with you trying to carry her everywhere."

As Yang's hand slipped away, and the blonde returned to her place at the back of the cockpit Blake sighed. Slowly, she untangled her fingers from Weiss's and pushed back against her seat, hard. Finally Blake said, "All right Weiss, the ship is yours, I know you can get us to the islands."

Weiss seemed to shake with excitement, her smile growing as she nodded at Blake's words and spoke. "Of course I can, I had a good teacher after all." Grasping the throttle Weiss slipped her free hand around the throttle and pushed it up making the engines hum shift into something like a roaring blowtorch. Dragging back the control lever Weiss cheered as they shot off at break neck speeds, "Stardust away!"

---

Yang was leaning against the cold steel walls of their, seemingly, newly named ship Stardust; idly she patter the formerly ship mounted mini-gun they'd scavenged months ago and mostly left to idle. Since her injuries in Morius Ruby had been doing it up for her since, proudly announcing it as a temporary replacement for the lost but not forgotten Ember Celica.

Leaning back Yang felt the thrum of the engine jets making the whole interior rumble. She remembered it causing no small amount of pain when she was still recovering. Her aching bones, muscles and worst of all her torched skin sensitive to pretty much everything, 'At least I covered that up, mostly,' Yang thought. Still, as time passed and the pain receded she'd come to find it rather soothing like she had before. There were few things wonderfully cathartic as a good working engine and Yang knew her ship inside and out, it had a very good engine.

"Zwei stay out of the tuna!" Ruby ordered, tugging the little corgi away from the cockpits food stash.

Rolling her eyes at that Yang let herself drop onto a weathered crate they'd strapped to the wall. Unfurling her Scroll she flicked her thumb over the web symbol and was please to hear a 'ding' of acknowledgement. As the Scroll tried to finalise the connection Yang glanced around their ships hull. Scavenged metal, Dust, bags, bought bullets, tools and foodstuff made the tiny space very crowded. Even without serving as a makeshift heater Yang expected they'd all need to squish together out of sheer pragmatism.

Yang was drawn from her thoughts by a 'ping!' coming from her Scroll. Grinning she slid her finger across the holo-screen to get her messages and- "What!?!" Yang asked as she found her message box empty.

'No way,' she thought. Scrolling over to the net Yang tried to bring up the news only to get a spinning circle of death. The message underlining it read 'No pages are available at this time'. "Oi, I can see the bars, why are you being so difficult?" She demanded, tapping her Scrolls side.

"What's wrong?" Blake asked, sliding from the cockpit like a shadow and leaning over Yang's side to stare at the screen.
"Blake, the Scroll is lying to me," Yang pouted, half jokingly half to cover her annoyance. 'We’re in range of the Support Tower, I checked the map!

"Maybe Grimm got the Support Tower?" Blake guessed.

"I suppose, but if that's the case I shouldn't be getting a connection at all but it just keep dropping out and nothing new loads," Yang said.

"We can hook it up to the Bullhead, see if that boosts it maybe?" Blake suggested.

"Yeah I guess, lets wait till we get to the islands though, there's no point in interrupting Weiss," Yang said, letting her Scroll drop into her lap she banged her head against the wall.

"Don't be so dramatic," Blake chided, a mirthful smirk on her lips.

"I wanted a new mission," Yang groaned, "and I had calls to make. I mean, this is our first time heading to Mistral, why can't everything just work!"

"Your first time," Blake corrected quickly, her words spilling out faster as she ensured Yang couldn't ask her anything. "Anyway that's just one of the troubles with travel, a trip that happens without anything going wrong doesn't exist."

"Bleh," Yang stuck out her tongue, "So pessimistic, still if crappy Scroll reception is the worst we have to deal with that's not bad. How long till we get to the islands? I wanna refuel before we hit Mistral proper, maybe get some lunch too."

"We'll be there in an hour or so," Blake said, dropping onto a box next to Yang, fingers tapping her legs in slow deliberate patterns. "There's meant to be lots of fish on the coast so lunch should be easy enough, we still have the fishing rods right?"

"Yeah they're folded up in one of the compartments," Yang said.

"Good, that's... good," Blake trailed off.

"You do know you left Weiss, Ruby and Zwei alone in the cockpit right?" Yang asked, arching her eyebrows at the Faunus.

Blake's ears twitched and she nodded, "Yes, I'm trying not to think about it. I don't want to be a backseat pilot or just watch over the monitors."

"Ah but who 'is' watching them?" Yang chuckled, barely resisting the urge to rib her friend. She'd picked up quickly that Blake did not enjoy even a gentle tap or shove the way she and Ruby did, and so the blonde made an effort to respect Blake's space.

"I'm sure they'll be fine, probably, I'll help with the landing though," Blake said, her usually slightly rough voice a bit hastier than normal.

Nodding to the cockpit Yang said, "Come on, I'll make sure you don't accidentally mutiny and you can make sure we don't enter a nose dive."

"What about 'letting Weiss learn to fly'," Blake asked sarcastically.

"Well," Yang drawled, "you gotta keep a close watch even then, make sure they don't stop flapping, watch out for Nevermores, bullies and all that."

Rising to her feet with a sigh Yang pointed to the cockpit, tensing for a moment at the distinct
absence of gold metal against her skin. Resisting the urge to look around for something she knew wasn't there Yang said, "Come on, I wanna hear where Weiss got that name from anyway."

"We really shouldn't distract her while she's flying," Blake said, close behind Yang as she slipped into the cockpit.

Weiss's breath came in short little puffs as she flew, actually flew through the air! 'This is even better than my first time on an airship,' she thought. Images of a cold steel ship, crowded with well dressed people sipping wine and blocking the windows ran through her head. Her 'handler' placing one hand on her shoulder, a subtle but clear reminder to behave as she curtsied at business associates like a doll to be cooed at. Only briefly seeing Atlas's towers and the snowy peaks from the window when Winter took her aside for just a moment.

Grip on the controls tightening Weiss felt the gently vibrations of the ships engines run through her hands. A gentle push angled them down and she shot through a cloud, bursting out the other side, the tip of Stardust sparkling in the sunlight. The whole world laid out before her in one bright shining package and-

"Wow, you've gotten so good at this Weiss!" Ruby cheered from the co-pilots seat.

And company she welcomed rather than bared until she could sneak off. Grinning from ear to ear Weiss said, "Thank you Ruby." A gentle pull on the lever tilted the ship right and Weiss felt the subtle shift in the air and weight around her. 'If I'd known flying was so much fun I'd have learnt ages ago!' She thought, guiding Stardust around clouds like they were obstacles in a game. Every duck and weave a joy.

Heavy boots stomping against steel resounded throughout the cockpit as Yang rejoined them. If Blake was with her Weiss certainly couldn't tell and she wasn't about to go turning around to check.

"So where'd ya even get a name like Stardust, Weiss?" Yang asked, the blondes overclocked body temperature seeping through the back of Weiss's chair as the blonde hovered around behind her.

"You guys aren't disappointed by the name are you?" Weiss asked, a little too giddy to truly inflect a sense of commiseration into her tone.

It was Ruby who spoke first, with a confused, "Hm?" before shrugging. "Not really, I mean I was thinking we could name her Blossoming Rose, but if you like Stardust-"

"I do," Weiss added.

"Then I guess I do too," Ruby said.

"It is an interesting choice for you though," Blake added in her usually bland and distant tone.

Clenching down on the little jolt of surprise that ran through her at Blake's presence, Weiss guided the ship back onto a straight path, safety first and all that. 'One day she's going to give me a heart attack,' Weiss thought.

"Well," Weiss said slowly, "I suppose you could say its a name that's close to my heart."

"Oh? tell us more," Yang said squatting down at her side.

Weiss felt her eyes droop just slightly as dazzling woman with white hair and warm words flowed
through her mind. "It was my Nana," Weiss said. "When I was little, well, I didn't see her often before," Weiss shrugged, knowing they'd understand what she meant. "But she was always so, so different from everyone around me, even when she seemed distant she was doing something fun or strange. She always had this glow about her, an energy."

Weiss couldn't hear the soft almost lyrical sound her voice took. "I was, well I couldn't have been more than four and she just came out of nowhere when I was practising piano saying she had a present for me. It was a tricycle from when she was a girl, covered in sparkles and drawing and I just loved it. I spent the rest of the day riding around the halls of the house, skidding around every corner and I think I broke a few things," she laughed.

"It was fun," Weiss finally said, "And I remembered how exciting and fast everything felt on my Nana's Stardust and well... our ships kind of similar..."

Trailing off Weiss glanced, for just a moment, out of the corner of her eyes. Ruby was squeezing Zwei like a plush toy and gaping, silvery eyes going completely doe at her and Weiss could almost feel heat rising in her cheeks. Blake had one of her wispy little grins and Yang, something flickered across her face before the blonde sent Weiss one of her usually cheerful grins.

Rising up Yang stretched and said, "I like that name, Stardust, good choice Weiss, you and your Nan have good taste"

"Why thank you," Weiss preened, she only half noticed that Yang was practically glowing as she strode away, inadvertently sending another pulse of warmth through the cockpit.

She was drawn from her happy state when a dark line stretched across the horizon before them. Dark greens, greys and thick browns mixed with white crashing foam told Weiss the coast was approaching and thus, so were the islands.

Ruby gasped excitedly and both she and Weiss leaned forward in unison and shouted, "Land ho!"

Ruby jumped from her seat, Zwei swinging in her arms as she and Yang left Weiss and Blake to the landing. The ship, Stardust, Ruby corrected herself, swayed and wavered as it began to descend. The powerful hissing roar of the engines slowly dying down as they came closer and closer to the island and Ruby had only one thought on her mind.

"Picnic, picnic, picnic!" she cheered.

Yang had already pulled the thick brown blanket they'd be using into her arms. Atop it sat a small pile of snacks, dried food, a cooking slab, and two boxes filled with treats they'd been saving since buying them at the last town on Vytals coast.

"Eeh, this is gonna be great," Ruby said, practically bouncing as she used her free hand to scoop up a small mass of glass and plastic bottles filled with soft drinks, all rare treats in the wilds.

"Ease up little sister we'll be down soon," Yang said as the ship wavered grew just a tad faster.

"Can't wait," Ruby answered, elbowing the hatch and being met with a clunk as the doors swung open. Not wasting a moment Ruby umped from Stardust with a cheer, quickly followed by Yang. Above them the ship wiggled and continued its downward descent, the landing gears already out and the ground barely more than a few metres away Weiss seemed intent of taking every possible second to line up.
'I guess she doesn't want to get chewed out by Yang or Blake and get stopped from driving again,' Ruby thought. If Bullheads weren't designed for people to jump out of while in flight she might have been worried about messing with Weiss's chances!

Letting Zwei loose Ruby sprinted away from the Bullhead and across the island, an almost manic grin on her lips. So many days cooped up in the ship, no running, no sprinting, she couldn't even wrestle with Yang properly to burn off energy lest they dent the ship!

But now she was free, now she was out! Thick seaside plants crushed under her boots, Ruby only taking a cursory care to avoid stomping on them. They were a mass of thick watery leaves, all a mix of dark browns and bright greens. The island itself was even big enough to have some long grass, or weeds, but it was like grass so what did she care?

White rock ran below the packed sands and rose up on nearly all sides of the islands edges as Ruby darted and blurred her way around it. Each time she came to a stop she took a moment to let the sea spray hit her nostrils and patter against her face like droplets of rain. "Mmmm, aaaaah," Ruby side, breathing in the tangy, salty air. A small path cut out of the rocks let the island dip right into the water and just like a real beach the water lapped and battered at the golden sand, dying it a dark brown. 'If only I brought a bathing suit!' Ruby thought, shrugging she spun around like a whirlwind, only to wobble as she ground to a halt at the sight that caught her eyes.

Jutting out of the side of the islands side some few feet away was a jetty. Dark brown, waterlogged wood sat next to a small, nearly flat, bit of rock that bent up into something like a loose path onto the island itself while the rest stretched out some ways into the water. It was old though, creaking and groaning, so thick with water it looked like she could squeeze it and it'd burst. The wood itself was cracked and broken, entire sections missing or sinking into the water at an uneven pace.

Ruby was so distracted she barely heard Yang stomp up behind her until her sister said, "Not disappointed are you?"

"Hm?" Ruby asked, tilting her head quizzically at her sister before glancing at Stardust, the ship having finally landed, Weiss and Blake just now climbing out. "Oh about the ship, eh, maybe a tad," she shrugged. "But I wasn't lying, I like Weiss's name and, well..." she trailed off.

Yang clapped her on the back and nodded in understanding. The look on Weiss's face when she'd talked about her 'Nana' and that bike, and in no small part the image of a tiny excitable little Weiss riding said bike, could have melted a stone heart. "Yeah, I don't think any of us had the heart to say no to that face, but I guess its worked out well. So what are you looking at, the jetty?"

"Yeah I didn't think this place would be settled," Ruby said.

"Any port in a storm I guess, there's meant to be some small fishing villages dotting the coast. This place is probably where they come if a storm rolls in and they're too far out to get back in time," Yang said.

"That makes sense... Did Blake tell you that when you two were fishing yesterday?" Ruby asked, sending a cheeky little grin to Yang. The memory of Blake and Yang dangling their legs outside the Bullhead as it chugged through the air, catching absurd numbers of fish thanks to how far out they were flashing in Ruby's mind.

"Hey now, that was a completely original thought," Yang said in mock hurt, clutching her heard. Finally she chuckled and said, "Though we have talked about this kind of a stuff a bit so who knows, maybe it slipped in. Anyway if its not been repaired for awhile maybe the village is, gone," Yang said awkwardly.
"Or," Ruby added, "it could just be the wrong season, or Grimm-"

"Or any number of things like a strong storm or lazy builders," Yang said, waggling her eyebrows, "I just wanted to run through all out options sis."

"Fine, fine, come on lets go set up for our picnic!" Ruby cheered again, dashing towards Weiss and Blake. Ruby knew that, technically, any meal they had could be considered a picnic, or a camp out. However this was their, well, most of their first times on Mistral, in a new, nice looking place so pulling out all the stops to make an event of it, well, that was just keeping things fun right?

Blake’s hands were hidden under her usual cloak that billowed a little in the wind. Otherwise the Faunus look around gently sniffing the air, her ears twitching as she turned to face her and Yang as they approached. "Do you want to check the fuel situation now or after lunch?" she asked.

Shrugging Yang said, "Better safe than sorry I guess, do you two mind laying out the stuff?"

"Sure thing sis you can count on us!" Ruby said, saluting.

Yang slipped the blanket and pile of foodstuffs into a lost looking Weiss's hands. "Call us if you need anything," Yang said, before turning away, chattering with Blake as they left. "So we need like a third of Burn propulsor, did the scans-

"They didn't pickup anything but we might as well look around just in case," Blake said as they vanished back into the ship.

"Uh, I've never been on a picnic before, Atlas weather," Weiss said, forcing a chuckle.

"That means we'll have to make this the best one ever then right, and not just best by default either! Come on lets set up where we have a view," Ruby said, grasping Weiss's hands and leading her towards the dip on the island where the waves lapped against the sand, Zwei barrelling after them, barking and flipping happily.

"OK, now I'll take all of this," Ruby grunted as she tried to rearrange the piles of containers in her arms along with the drinks. "And you lay out the blanket, then we put everything down and eat together."

"All right," Weiss shrugged, flicking out the blanket with one sharp crack she draped it across the ground like she was making a bed.

"Wow you're good at this, ooh quick get the heavy thing son the corners!" Ruby instructed as she jumped onto the blanket and they began unpacking their lunch.

"You can't put that bottle there, its not symmetrical," Weiss said, snatching the green glass bottle from the corner.

Ruby just giggled as she continued laying everything out, glancing at Zwei and Weiss from the corner of her eyes and trying to ignore the faintly familiar smell of... No, it couldn't be, there was just no way-

"I've got freshly baked cookies!" Yang cried, jumping from Stardust with a smirking Blake at her side. There was a small stack of brown chocolate chip beauties steaming on a shiny stone cooking slab that radiated heat along with its holder.
Yang winked at Ruby as she stepped onto the blanket and said, "I made sure everyone got one of their favourites."

"Best, picnic, ever!"

Blake rested her right side against the warm stone surface, half lidded eyes scanning her journal as rough grey sketches and sharp letters flicked across the pages. Blake was was draping herself haphazardly over some rocks, her cloak used as a cushion as she leaned against the white stone and enjoyed its heat. The waves splashed a little ways below the one foot she let dangle off her chosen perch, the other was curled up and used as a resting place for her journal.

Her belly rumbled contentedly, the steamed carp she and Yang had prepared, layered up with butter had hit the spot after so many weeks of blander, and often drier meals. Licking her lips Blake flicked onto the next page of her journal, sketches of Morius's grand Crystal Heart were sprawled across several pages. On all sides she had notes and other sketches of the murals the ancient city had possessed, their doors, their houses, she’d wanted to absorb it all, record it, so at least someone remembered.

Shaking her head Blake ran her tongue along her lips, the faint taste of fish and butter still lingering and drawing her back to the moment. Flicking through more pages Blake slipped a pencil into her hands as she came upon a blank page, 'I might as well start another entry,' she decided.

After a filling lunch they'd spread across the island to do whatever suited them. Yang and Zwei had taken to the ocean, paddling around and splashing like mad. Ruby had half joined them but seemed to be bouncing between the water, Weiss and the ship. Weiss was sunbathing, or so she said, the sunscreen they'd pulled out of an old wreck, goopy stuff that Weiss had almost refused to use, and the blanket and giant hat defied her plans. If Blake's ear heard right, and they always did, the heiress had dozed off.

Glancing back over the island Blake got to work, sharp quick strokes across the page leaving dark marks with a rough scratching noise. 'A coastal image, that could be nice, then maybe a landscape,' Blake thought. Even as she drew she reflected on what she might write, how to inject her time on the little islands into her image and words. Shading, tone, angle, all these things mattered when truly trying to impart something onto paper.

'I should probably mentioned lunch to,' she thought, a glint flashing in her eyes as a fish burst from the water and then went crashing back into the ocean. Whatever else someone could say about Yang the woman knew how to cook, better than any of them at least, something she largely attributed to preparing meals for Ruby and herself and cooking with their parents at times. 'Though why their uncle wasn't allowed near the stove... No I probably don't want to ask,' Blake thought.

Compared to the, currently guffawing blonde, Ruby could cook a little, mostly baking and salads apparently. Weiss could... boil water, and fry things with the same rigid, regimented attitude she applied to most time related tasks. And Blake herself, well, she'd had to cook sometimes in the past, and had gotten more than a few grumbles for never trying to add a 'flourish' to her meal like she did her art by-

Her pencil scratched across the page almost, almost tearing the paper until the laughing of her friends and the rolling sound of the waves brought her back to reality. 'No, he's not here, I'm gone, I left, he is not ruining this,' Blake told herself. Sucking in a breath she glanced at the page and sighed in relief at the sight. 'At least I didn't go too far off, I can just make some foam here and-"
"What-cha doin?" Ruby asked, so close Blake could feel the younger Huntresses breath on her ears as Ruby tried to lean over her.

Choking down her gasp so it sounded like a hiccup Blake half spun around and stared at Ruby, "You snuck up on me."

"Heehee," Ruby answered, giggling as she jumped from her higher rock, slammed her palm into the one Blake was leaning against and used it to spin herself around mid-air and land right before her. "I guess I did, so, what are you doing?" She asked again, cheeks resting in her hands as she squatted in front of Blake and leaned forward, trying to catch a peak.

"Oh just," Blake had to resist the urge to pull her journal up to her chest and hide it but, it was a sketch, and, this was Ruby she was talking too... "Just a sketch I was working on, want to see?" Spinning her journal around Blake watched Ruby's silver eyes widen as the girl "oohed" and "ahhced".

"I barely started Ruby," Blake said, lips edging into a grin as she spun her journal back around and began toying with the pencil. 'In the right light...' Blake mused staring at Ruby.

"Yeah maybe, but I can tell its gonna look great already, I didn't know you drew, that's really cool, do you do like, people, places..." Ruby said, waving.

"Landscapes," Blake filled in for her.

Nodding Ruby continued, "Or like other stuff, Yang and I drew up our plans for our weapons, I've been doing all sorts since we all met, even more now that we need to replace Ember Celica but-"

"Wait you two draw?" Blake asked, ears twitching.

"Sure, Yang not so much now, or when she does its all really technical stuff put together with programs, I'm a bit more hands on, I have tons of designs and outlines in my Scroll." Chuckling Ruby said, "I got an app that lets me draw with my finger on the screen, its actually really good, ooh can I see your other drawings?!" She asked, shifting from topic to topic like lightning arced through the air with nary a pause.

"I think I'd love to see your drawing Ruby, I may even have a few ideas but first, how long do you think you can stay still?" Blake asked. She could do it from memory, or maybe not at all, Ruby could be shy but nothing beat the live experience.

"Hm, oh for a little while I guess, wait are you offering to draw me?" She squeaked.

"Only if you don't mind, you'd really add something to the scene," Blake said.

Ruby was crimson as she scratched the back of her head and said, "Well I guess I can give it a shot, thanks Blake!"

"No problem, and don't worry, I'm faster than you're think," she said, pencil already strafing along paper.

Weiss let out a low moan as she stretched out on the picnic blanket, arms and legs pushed as far as they could go. Wriggling her fingers and toes Weiss sucked in a deep breath and went back to lying limp. The suns rays, the faint imprint of her body in the sand and being cocooned in soft blankets felt luxurious.
A strong breeze wafted over her, the sand kept at bay by a barricade of boxes she'd constructed.

"Hey Weiss, don't pretend your asleep I saw you moving, come on and join us!" Yang called from the water, followed by a happy bark from Zwei.

"I'm just fine thank you!" Was Weiss's answer. However given it was Yang she shouldn't have been surprised when the blond broke from the water and ambled over to her.

Glancing at Yang through half lidded eyes Weiss took note of how her friend practically sparkled from the water dripping offer her powerful frame. Yang's gargantuan hair was so wet it hung down nearly to her knees and was draped over her whole body, hiding most of the tube top and short shorts she'd worn as swimwear.

"You look like one of those lake dwelling faeries from the old stories," Weiss said, arching an eyebrow at the blonde.

"Hey I've been called worse things," Yang chuckled. "So still don't wanna join us? I mean, come on, its not like we don't live in closed quarters so there's nothing to be embarrassed about."

"I'm fine just dozing and watching everyone have fun, thank you," Weiss said. Seeing the smirk spreading on Yang's lips Weiss swatted at the her leg and continued, "Cold water and salty hair have never really been my thing. Also please step back you're going to drip on me," despite that, the moment she heard Zwei pad up to her Weiss slipped her left hand out from under the blankets and scratched the corgi's ear. '

Oh my gosh he's so squishy and fluffy!'

"Well I can't do much about the salt but as to the cold and the dripping, hehe, remember who you're talking to here," Yang said. Slamming her fists together the sound of a flame roaring to life struck the air with a sharp crackle. The air around Yang shook, kicking up sand and her body shone gold and red for an instant before being hidden behind a hissing wave of steam.

Propping herself up on her elbows Weiss let out a little snort at the sight. "Oh my gosh your hair, you're like a puffy lion!" She gasped. And she was, Yang's golden waves had flared up to ridiculous proportions and almost hid her face.

"Yeah I'm a regular old fuzzball," Yang said, smiling down at Weiss as she brushed her hair back into place. "If you don't want to join us in the water that's cool. But keep this in mind, I can heat up the entire area," She said with a wink.

"Hmm, I'll keep that in mind, think you could work in some bubbles and jets?" Weiss joked.

"Spoiled you all, that's what I've done. Anyway Ruby and I are planning on beach ball later so if you wanna join that just say so," Yang said, turning and strolling back to the beach with a wave.

"Wait, we have a beach ball?" Weiss called after her.

"Nah we'll just use rocks, or Zwei or something, maybe make one out of plastic; now Weiss, watch my high dive!" Yang tilted her head back and winked before she dug her feet into the ground, the sand smoke under her feet as she exploded forward. Leaping onto the highest rocky perch Yang threw up her arms and launched herself into the air with a small 'boom'.

Soaring into the air Yang rolled herself into a ball, her hair shining like a miniature sun as she spun towards the water. Zwei yipped and ran after her as Yang struck the ocean like a bomb sending a pillar of water and steam into the sky.

"How was that!?" Yang shouted.
"Very impressive!" Weiss answered, shaking her head as she rose to her feet, "honestly they can be such children at times..." A smirk edged onto her lips. "Now let me show you how to do a real high dive!" She shouted, dashing towards the sea.

"Arf!" Zwei barked happily as he followed her.

As the day wore on the four Huntresses and dog found themselves moseying about the island. Craters were left in the islands surface from Aura charged beach balls, more than a few people shrieked when they were dragged into the water and none of them could say they hadn't left their mark on the island.

Now, as the sun set, Weiss, Ruby, Blake and Zwei were loafing about around on blankets, rocks or against Stardust's side, the Bullhead's open door providing all the light they needed. The smell of fish cooking and sizzling in flames wafted through the air as Yang marched over towards them.

Grinning as her hair lit up Yang held aloft a rectangular platter layered with smoking cook fish and loudly announced, "Introducing the Rose-Xiao Long Family Secret Fish Kebab Recipe! Fish, on a Stick," she winked.

Only Weiss chortled at the woeful pun, Ruby groaning, While Blake beat Zwei to the punch, grabbing two of the skewered fish from the platter and biting into their crunchy surface, stinging hot spices and juices flooding her senses.

As everyone, including Zwei, took their own serving, the camp filled with the sounds of chewing and appreciative groans of delight.

For her part Blake leaned back against the ship and nearly let her whole body sag, once she'd eaten she was going right to bed.

"We should do stuff like this more often, celebrate ya know?" Ruby said, seemingly from nowhere, her legs wiggling as she beamed at them.

A cloud seemed to flicked out of sight in the distance Blake noticed, half turning her head.

Nodding Weiss said, "I wholeheartedly agree Ruby, today's been quite enjoyable and we all need to relax sometimes."

'What?' Blake thought.

"Smell the seaweed and all that?" Yang chuckled.

Blake's eyes shot open at the flash of glowing crimson and she shouted, "Get in the ship!"

Chapter End Notes

To anyone who's come back or is reading this for the first time, hi there, thanks for sticking with the Knights Errant so long, I hopes its been an enjoyable reading experience!
What I've posted today is the opening chapter for the next adventure arc for the Knights Errant, as always I'd like to thanks Person With Many Aliases over on SB for beta reading and offering tons of helpful suggestions, if you're ever in the ballpark for a good read, their 'The Glass Menagerie' is an incredibly well written fic.

Not a ton to say on this chapter save that I hope everyone felt in character and the descriptions and dialogue worked. I'm hoping to have a consistent update schedule over the coming weeks leading up to V4 as the first draft of this current 'Pirate Signals' arc is complete and now its just editing to be done.

Thanks for reading, and as always questions, comments or critique are more than welcome!
More than a raptors screech or a lions roar, the bellow of the Griffons was like an explosion in the night's sky. Their sleek black forms flew like torpedoes as the trio of Grimm swirled around one another and tore through clouds in pursuit of their quarry.

Jets flared, and Stardust rocketed through the skies in sharp dips and twists. The engine's normally unseen blue flames were shining white and leaving heat trails in the air.

Atop the Bullhead, tethered to the ship by black ropes around their ankles, stood four figures. Weiss was kneeling near the front of the ship, body and even hair held in place against the titanic winds by a simple Glyph. Zwei was in the middle of the ship snarling and barking at the shadows hurtling towards them, while Yang and Ruby stood precariously on a wing each, all tethered by ropes and Glyphs as they braced for the oncoming assault.

Pulling down her scope in a flash, Ruby squeezed the trigger and her bullet exploded through a black propulsion Glyph and towards their attackers. "They dodged!" She shouted, she barely had time to realign her aim as the Griffons wings dipped and they dived, "Incoming!"

"Keep us steady Blake!" Weiss said.

"Second volley!" Yang roared as the Grimm dived towards them. Hefting her, formerly, ship mounted mini gun up she yanked on the top mounted handle and practically crushed the trigger in her grasp. A spray of fiery bullets tore through the skies, Yang and her guns furious roars drowning out the wind and sending vibrations through the ship.

As the bullets peeled through the air in a stream of light the Griffons broke ranks. Two pulling out of their dive and swirling out wider. The third stayed the course, barely dipping out of the way of the attack and letting out a shrill cry as its shoulder and chest was struck.

'It's still coming!?" Yang thought, as the Griffon wavered but bore her shots, slowing down, but not stopping.

"Weiss cover me!" Ruby shouted as she brought Crescent Rose up again, adding her sniper fire to Yang's own.

'Too fast, they're coming in close, was that one a sacrifice, are they that smart?" Yang thought frantically. She could see the remaining two coming in closer, talons outstretched. Yang's Aura flexed instinctively, her wrists twitched as she tried to open Ember Celica but found her arms bare. 'Not the time, not the time!"

"Brace yourselves!" Weiss shouted.

The Griffons were coming, one from above and to Ruby's side and the other below.

Blake could only hope they listened to her instructions as her radar and cameras alerted her to Griffons attack. 'I have to time this just right, and, dammit,' she thought. Growling Blake's left hand shot out and yanked the mini-gun controls, the bottom-hatched gun spun around and opened fire just as the Griffons claws scraped against the ships base. 'Should have had Weiss down there, she,
Grasping the lever in one hand Blake's hands blurred across the console. For one instant the jets flared out even as they began to slide around, she could hear the attack commencing up above and-

Blake yanked on the lever, slammed her hands on the ignition, in a dizzying explosion of momentum she sent Stardust spinning in a barrel role even as it angled upwards. There was a thunk up above and she shouted, "Weiss, Speed Glyphs, now!" An intricate blue pattern burst to life before her and Blake gunned it, head slamming back against her seat from the force as they shot forward, leaving the duo of Griffons to crash into each other.

"Is everyone-" Blake started.

"We're fine!" Weiss answered.

Letting out a sigh of relief Blake scanned the cameras and hissed at the sight. The bottom of the ship was in tatters, the mini-gun had been bitten in half and several compartments and pipes were lost. 'Non essentials I think, but we'll be running badly, oh no,' Blake thought. "Guys they damaged the base of the ship and I think they took a chunk out of the catalyser."

"We're gonna be flying heavy now," Yang said over the radio, "You're gonna have to burn a lot of fuel to keep us going regular, shit, incoming!"

Blake slammed the controls to the side, trying to weave around the Griffons that could only be coming from up above. The cameras flashed as one shot past, pursued by a stream of ice daggers but the resounding bang up above told Blake she hadn't dodged both of them.

'All I can do is trust in the others and hope we find a settlement,' Blake thought, flaring the engines again and sending them hurtling through the clouds.

"Guh!" Ruby barely brought up Crescent Rose in time to block the Griffons kick that sent her skidding along the Bullhead. Only Weiss's Glyphs keeping her from needing to stab the ship to keep from flying off.

Brandishing her weapon Ruby opened fire; the Griffon was swift and smart though. Ducking and sliding along the Bullheads top, talons cutting into steel, it weaved around their attacks as best it could while tearing at the ship.

"I'm low on Dust!" Weiss shouted, conjuring Glyphs beneath the Griffon's powerful limbs to try and protect the ship.

Yang snarled as she grappled with the beast, unable to open fire with scarcely any bullets left and the Grimm so low. Instead she was trying to smash its sharp angled head in with her mini-gun, only for her mini gun to get caught in its beak. The Griffon reared back and slammed her in the guts with its talons sending her gagging and bouncing across the wing.

Zwei snarled and lunged forward, supported by Weiss and Ruby's cover fire, while Yang tried to pull herself back up without destroying the wing. Blasting through a propulsion Glyph, Zwei slammed into the Griffon's side head-first and sent it skidding across Stardust's roof with a shriek of anger.

Spinning around and baring down on its attackers, the Griffon let loose another mighty roar with
its guttural voice. Zwei leapt at the Grimm only to be met by a headbutt that sent the dog yelping backwards; only to be caught up in the mighty winds and sent flying into the Grimm's maw.

"Zwei!" They all shouted, Ruby's sniper fire battering its wings.

Weiss called forth a Glyph right inside the Grimms open beak, locking the confounded monster's mouth in place and allowing Zwei to kick off from the Glyph knocking the Griffons head back into the ships tail fin. Snarling as the last few ice bullets slammed into the base of its wings the Griffon charged. Its talons dug into the side of the ship and it lunged for the left jet just as Yang pulled herself back up.

Instinctively Yang punched the air, some idiot part of her forgetting she was unarmed as she unleashed nothing but a hot puff of Aura. Failing to divert the Grimm's attack she bore witness as its talons tore into the curved jets, peeling back the metal to unveil an explosive wave of fire.

"Get off my ship!" Yang bellowed, a hot wave of Aura wreathed across her skin like fire as she rushed to the Griffons side and struck it across the beak with a loud snap.

Spinning around the Griffon tried to leap into the air, maybe expecting its durability to protect it from the fall as its wings tried to flap and break the ice.

The engines sputtered and shrapnel hurtled into the air as the jet exploded. The ship began to dip right and spin. But just as the Griffon looked to be getting away it bounced off a Glyph and squawked as Yang's hands slipped around its neck.

All around Yang the world began to blur, fire and smoke billowed around her as they spun and twisted in the air. But Yang had only one thought on her mind. Hair shining gold and eyes crimson red to match the Grim's own she threw out her hands and sunk her fingers into the monster's steely feather-covered form and pulled the struggling beast against her chest. Teeth grinding as she desperately tried to keep the Griffon in place as she weaved one arm over the over and hugged it tighter even as its confused claws swipes scraped down her Aura leaving her silently screaming through clenched teeth.

Sharp, thick feathers pressed against her bare arms, each one was sharper than any dagger she might have held and so dense it was a wonder such a monster could even fly. Thrashing against her, Yang felt the Griffons struggle as she dragged it through the air and squeezed and squeezed, another wave of Aura travelling into her arms, swelling her up until she felt like she'd burst and-

The crack was loud, popping her ears and leaving the Griffon barely a second to let out a feeble death wail before Yang hurled its broken body off the ship and to the darkened ground below...

"Brace!" Weiss screamed.

Blake yanked back the lever, angling the one remaining jet forward to slow their chaotic descent. The ship was tipping, one of the doors had been blasted off in the chaos and deafening winds were ripping anything not tied down from the ship in a maelstrom. They'd passed the rocky coast and now it was spindly trees and rivers waiting below.

With Stardust shaking and rumbling, the remaining jet-engine screaming as she twisted the controls, forcing the jets to lift them straight up so the base of the ship would meet the ground rather than the nose.

Blake could only hope she'd done enough as she felt their ship grind against the ground. The earth
below sent the ship jerking upwards, its entire frame vibrating so much it all seemed a blur to Blake. The clangs of metal and the thick thundering sound of the dirt and stone battering the ship wear deafening.

Grasping the controls, Blake's eyes were locked on the window even as dirt and grass and bark smashed against it. Teeth grit, she slammed her feet against the the floor, bracing for the shock-waves incoming as they skidded across the ground, digging a might trench into the dirt.

Faster than it seemed to start though, Blake could feel them lurching to a halt. The engine's whine dying down with an audible wheeze as the vibrations dimmed and the roaring faded as they ground to a stop with a crash of metal.

'That was... Smoother than it could have been,' Blake thought, mind a whirl with how easily it could have ended in a nose dive or a much faster descent than her cruising speed crash.

A low pant slipped from Blake's lips as she scanned the readers and found nary a blip and then, the ship whined again. A deep agonised groan echoed in the air, before Stardust toppled to its side and she was dropped from her chair into the cockpit walls with a thunk.

Blurry eyes looked out across the small room as Blake pulled herself to her feet, the adrenaline fading. Her journal was, thankfully, on her person, same for Gambol Shroud but... everything else, the ship, she couldn't even begin to say.

Jumping up Blake darted through the sideways entrance to the cockpit towards the ruined door and pulled herself up onto the Bullheads side, the one intact wing jutting into the air while the airship itself lay on its side like a dying animal.

For one brief, agonising moment Blake's lungs froze, her heart stilled and her stomach churned. 'Where are they!?' she thought, head snapping around as she sought out her team.

"Yo," Yang offered sullenly as she pulled herself up onto the other side of the ship, a talon like scratch mark slowly knitting itself together on her cheek. "We're all OK, well, sore, but alive," she said, motioning towards the other side of the ship.

Blake flung herself up with an afterimage and landed on the dirt and grass patch covered mounts they'd stopped on.

Weiss was slumped against the ship, her blade empty and Zwei resting in her lap. Each breath Weiss took was low and the given how tattered her coat was, Blake guessed Weiss's Aura was taxed to put it mildly.

Ruby was scanning around with Crescent Rose before finally lowering the weapon as she and Yang arrived and said. "I think we scared any nearby Grimm off, the Griffons are gone too."

"I'm sorry," Blake said, unaware of how her own voice shook, sweaty hands squeezing tight she said, "I thought I could out-fly them, staying on an island where they could dive bomb made us too-"

Blake stopped as Yang clapped her on the shoulder and said, "Relax, this is't anyone's fault, they were strong."

"Yeah you did awesomely, we all did, except for all the parts where we didn't," Ruby mumbled glancing at the torn wing of their ship.

"What are we going to do now?" Weiss asked, sounding as exhausted as she had when she and
Blake had, had their first confrontation.

"We figure out where we are, what we have, and make sure we all stay alive," Yang said firmly. "Blake you mind helping me scout, maybe there's some left overs we can scavenge, I can't fix the wing with what we have but we still have that spare Gravity Dust so maybe I can..."

"There's people!" Ruby shouted, waggling Crescent Rose westwards to where they could make out the coast.

Humming in thought Blake said, "There was meant to be a small fishing village here, maybe we can stay there and figure out what to do."

"Good a plan as we've got, come on lets go meet them, Ruby, Weiss, Zwei, you guys watch Stardust," Yang said.

Blake saw the wince play across both her and Weiss's faces even as she joined Yang in a sprint towards the two small figures with lanterns in the distance.

As Ruby and Weiss were left out of earshot Blake heard Yang grunt and mutter, "I think I speak for all of us when I say Griffons suck."

"Yeah, they do," Blake said, knowing Yang just wanted to vent.

Yang glanced at her again and frowned, "Blake will you be OK given your reputation?"

"This is a small coastal town, and long range communications are still down, I guess the Support Tower was broken, or my radio wouldn't have performed so poorly. Chances are if they do know about me they found out months ago and have forgotten, if not," she shrugged, "we'll just have to see."

"Hail!" one of the stranger called, waving their lantern high, a woman by the voice if Blake didn't miss her guess. The duo wore relatively simple clothes, tough beaten leather and cloth shirts. On their sides were simple a machete and an axe respective. The machete wielder being a woman who was clearly old but barely as tall as Ruby with black hair and, Blake sniffed the air, and was evidently a feline Faunus like herself. The axe wielder was a lanky older human with freckles and curly brown hair.

"We saw you crash sirs, how can we help?" the man asked.

"That's nice of you, I'm Yang and this is Blake, we ran afoul some Griffons on out way here from Vytal. Don't suppose you'd happen to have somewhere we could store a busted Bullhead while we fix it do you?" She asked.

Yang's eyes weren't adapted for the night, Blake's were and she saw an uncomfortable look flash across the two villagers faces, one of confusion then worry.

"We can pay and the Griffons are either dead or beaten off," Blake said, trying to calm their nerves.

There was a moment of silence before the woman nodded and said, "We've a warehouse that could hold your ship, we never use it and you are Huntresses, yes?"

"Yep," Yang said.

"Then just keeping any Grimm away will be thanks enough, provided you behave yourselves," she said.
"Won't be a problem ma'am, we'll keep to ourselves," Blake said, some part of her still unconsciously checking to see if they were inspecting her ears.

"It'll take some work getting your ship back though," the man said, rubbing his peach fuzz beard.

Gesturing to their ship, or crash sight now Blake supposed, the blonde kept on her usual cheery voice as she said, "We can figure something out, there's more than just us, do you have any fighters? We could use some help with the ship."

"Not... many," the man answered, his words airy and unsure.

"Most are away, trying to fix the Support Tower," the woman supplied. "The wretched things been down for weeks and normally we don't get many Grimm out this way."

"And then Griffons come out of nowhere, typical isn't it?" Yang said with a snort. "Listen," she continued, rubbing the back of her neck, "If you don't mind showing us the way we'll go get the ship and start moving, it's been kind of a long night now."

'And to think just half an hour ago we were eating dinner;' Blake thought, the smell and taste of her meal replaced by the scent of smoke and taste of copper.

Thee Shoreleight locals nodded and the four of them turned and began marching back to the ship. "Oh where are my manners," the man said, "I'm Escuo, and my friend here is Ginger, we're from Shorelight, a fishing town."

"It's a pleasure to meet you both," Yang said, for a moment not sounding like she'd just been in a crash at all, though Blake could hear the underlying tension in her tone. "Thanks again for being so welcoming, I only wish our landing hadn't been so auspicious!"

"It's no trouble at all, thank you for driving off the Griffons, when our watchers saw them we all began to worry," Escuo said as they approached the Bullhead.

"Hey guys, this is Escuo and Ginger, they said if we could move it, we could keep Stardust at their town's warehouse until we fix her so long as we keep any Grimm off their backs, nice huh?" Yang said.

Rising to her feet Weiss curtsied and said, "It's a pleasure to meet your both, thank you for your help, this has been, a trying night," she sighed.

"It was really good until the Griffons turned up," Ruby added before glancing at the ship. "So I'm guessing you guys don't have a crane right?"

Escuo and Ginger shook their heads.

"How are you going to move the ship?" Escuo asked, audibly gulping. "I thought when it crashed it might not have been so... damaged."

"Well if Blake was right about the damage to the base, then the Gravity Dust is still there at least," Yang said, "But yeah we need a bit more than that..."

Ruby grinned, "Don't worry, I have a plan," she said with a wide smirk as she looked at Yang and Weiss.

Chapter End Notes
Notes:
Here we are with chapter 2, I hope it was enjoyable and makes up for the cliffhanger ending of chapter 1, as always thank you to Person With Many Aliases for being an awesome beta reader, and to everyone who has read, liked and commented!

This is pretty much my first time trying to detail an aerial battle so any points there would be appreciated and I hope the Griffons came across well, I'm a big fan of their design and overall threat level so I was eager for a chance to utilise them.

Also some fun extra notes for this chapter, Ember Celica is still gone after the last arc and the team have not yet been able to replace it. The mini-gun Yang utilised was something they scavenged during 'Scavenging Knights' and have been fixing up overtime. Also it turns out I may need to study up on my aerodynamics XD
"Uuuurrggblaaa," Ruby groaned as she tried to slip free of the cuddle-puddle they'd formed inside Stardust's deck last night. After they’d finally managed to get Stardust to the town’s warehouse, Weiss and Yang had basically collapsed. She, Blake and Zwei had divvied up the remaining watch rotations - Blake's idea, cautious Huntress that she was - it had been a few hours before Ruby could get some sleep.

"Arf!"

"Zwei... I hear you," She mumbled, lifting someone’s - maybe two people’s, it was too early to count - arms off of her. Lazily Ruby rubbed Zwei's head and yawned, ruffling her now very creased and beaten up black skirt and red cape. 'And Yang got this for me as a present too;' she thought, sighing at the minute tatters and steadily growing tears.

Finally, if clumsily, sitting up with an almost rattling shake of her body, Ruby felt a weak tug on her wrist and murmured as she remembered the string she’d tied to herself to the night before. With a single tug there was a loud clunking click and the warehouses few intact hanging lights illuminated their temporary retreat.

Sliding away from her still sleeping friends Ruby and Zwei hopped from the ships right, Ruby’s boots scraping on the cement as she landed. 'They said they didn't use this place much, and I guess they weren't kidding;' Ruby thought. During her watch she'd mostly kept to the block buildings flat cement roof and watched over the village.

Fairly small by warehouse standards, at least in Ruby's opinion, it was made uniformly from rough grey cement. There was only a weak bit of natural light streaming in through tiny smudged windows near the roof. It had as one very large door at the front and a tinier one off to the side which led into some sort of storage room or office, only Blake had checked. There were some stray boxes but half of them were open and clearly empty and the whole place generally stank of old fish, dust and reeked of disuse.

Untangling the string from her wrist and letting it drop to the floor Ruby unable to repress a groan at the sight of their ruined ship. 'Missing wings, the base is just a wreck it’s amazing we even have landing gears left. The mini-gun is just gone, who knows about the other internals and- and, all my bullets!'

Ruby's booted foot scraped across the cement, and she just barely avoiding cracking ground. Massed in a small pile next to their ruined ship was what little they'd been able to salvage on the way back. A still mostly intact sheet of steel, an ammo box, a few Dust containment cylinders and a few bits of other miscellaneous stuff pulled from the compartments and bags.

Before Ruby could ruminate further on their situation a high pitched groan echoed out of the ship which could only belong to Weiss. Her guess was confirmed when it became a groan of despair as the Huntress cried, "I was hoping that was just a horrible dream!"

Looking up Ruby said, "Sorry, no luck."
She was greeted by the sight of a dishevelled Weiss sticking her head out the ship's side door, a door held open more by hope than mechanics at this point. The white haired former heiress’s hair was a bird’s nest, half undone from her customary side-tail, tangled in her dinky little crown and coiling around and over her face. Weiss merely huffed and wipe a trail of drool of her chin with a disgusted little, "Bleh."

"Did you drool on my sister?" Ruby asked, squinting up at her friend.

Weiss blanched and then ducked back into the ship, then after a few second practically jumped out, staggering on the floor as she tried to find her feet. Finally meeting Ruby's gaze she glowered and muttered, "Tell no one."

"Too late!" Yang shouted, literally rolling out of the ship and landing in a crouch. Rising up she ambled forward, pushing her tangled mane from her eyes with one hand and patting them both on the head with the other.

Blake wasn't far behind, sliding out of the ship as silent as ever, her amber eyes trailing over the warehouse with her usual wariness for new places. "I checked our rations last night, the take isn't good," she finally said.

"Do we have any filling stuff? Because," Yang groaned clutching her belly, "I need food!"

"I too could-" Weiss's dignified statement was interrupted by her stomach growling so much Ruby could practically see it vibrating through her white dress-jacket.

"We have twenty strips of dried jerky, some bottles of water, and three tins of beans," Blake said blandly.

"That barely counts as food," Weiss moaned, shoulders slumping.

"Well we have something to eat at least," Ruby said, as cheerily as she could.

"Let’s just eat and try to figure out what to do about... all of this," Yang said, waving her hands at Stardust.

Rather than sticking around for breakfast Blake had simply said she was going to look around town. After taking a strip of jerky she left with one of her usual shadow jumps and no discernible exit. Accepting their teammate’s habitual patrol for what it was, the rest of the self-dubbed Knights Errant tore through their breakfast, mulling over what path to take next.

Gulping down the last of her jerky Yang let out a little 'wooh' before saying, "I'm basically gonna have to spend all day going over Stardust. I need to assess the damage, what we have left, what needs replacing, that's gonna take me at least six hours, probably a lot more for a really thorough check."

Raising her hand Ruby said, "Ooh I can handle dinner then!"

"How do you plan to do that?" Weiss asked as she folded her arms and arched her brow at the younger girl.
Ruby merely shot off in a blur and then returned with a spray of rose petals, two fishing rods in hand. "These survived the crash and we're in a fishing village! I mean, there was meant to be one more but I think Blake snuck that out under her cloak," she chuckled. "Anyway I can just set these up with lures and stuff and keep an eye on them with Zwei. Crescent Rose took a bit of a beating from that Griffon so I need to take her apart and check her out."

"Sounds fair, Zwei's already napping," Yang said, waving in the dog’s general direction. "So you got any plans Weiss, I could use some help, especially with Ruby and Blake all tied up."

"You know what," Weiss said, glancing at their ship, "I think I'll help you." Weiss tried not to be offended at the shared look of mutual disbelief that passed between the sisters. "What!?” She failed at not taking offence. "I learnt how to fly Stardust, maintenance only makes sense!"

"Ooh just like when those guys offered us a room at the inn but you said 'No thank you, we are Huntresses and our home is with our ship-,'" Ruby quoted.

"I did?" Weiss blinked.

"You did, it was pretty poetic, if I think slurred a little, though honestly I'm glad we did sleep here," Yang smiled as she looked over their ship. "Wouldn't want to leave our baby alone after a fight like that, so yeah if you wanna help Weiss feel free, every pair of hands is welcome!"

"Excellent, I'll join you after I've... does this place have a shower?" She asked, suddenly wishing that maybe they had gone to the inn.

"Hehe, I wouldn't worry about that for now," Yang said, a mischievous sparkling glint in her eyes before they suddenly snapped to Ruby. With all the cool calm authority that could only come from years of caring for another person like their own and knowing them inside and out Yang folded her arms and said, "Ruby, did our toothbrushes survive the crash?"

"Um, well, you see..."

"Don't lie to me little sister," Yang said, her tone unwavering.

Ruby slumped forward like a broken marionette and mumbled, "Mine did, I'll go wash up..."

"Good girl!" Yang cheered her on as Ruby approached the pile of their debris like it was made of molten lava.

"Now then," the blonde said, clapping her hands and leaning over to look Weiss in the eyes. "Shall we get started, apprentice?"

"Yang! Help! The reactant... this isn't going to wash out!"

"You're fine, Weiss."

"I don't remember the colour of my hands anymore!"

"Keep up the good work, Weiss."
"AND IT SMELLS!"

"As long as it's not a sweet smell, you're good, Weiss."

"ARRRGH!"

"Yeah, I don't think you need me for this, I'll check back on you in a few minutes."

The Shorelight docks were only sparsely inhabited, Blake noted. Tough and compact, wooden ships lined the water logged docks and pier. The dark water of the ocean having seemingly found its way into every crevice and path. It was so damp and wet that Blake wouldn't have walked on the street even if she wasn't trying to avoid notice.

'Inspect the area, listen for information, always be ready,' She reminded herself. The White Fang had been an understandably paranoid organisation and Blake had taken those lessons to heart more-so than most. Yet... Her stomach let out a low, unpleasant gurgle at the scent of fish flooding her senses.

Blake knew humans found the scent of raw fish, or raw meat in general unpleasant, but she- she did not, 'We are Faunus,' Adam's voice grounds out in her head. 'We are not humans, we will never be humans, we are our own species, never forget that. Some will cut their tails and file down their teeth, begging for approval, but not us!'

Blake had tried to pass for human before, tried to act in a way she thought would earn their acceptance. Sometimes she still did, even around her team. At other points in life she'd tried to be nothing but Faunus, even while knowing next to nothing about what that meant. Morius flashed through her mind for a moment before Blake shook the memory off. 'Not the time,' she reminded herself.

She could see a fellow feline Faunus in stained clothes sitting in a chair next to a barrel half filled with blue scaled fish. He was old, with a weather beaten beard and hat and tired eyes. Even still he casually scaled and gutted the fish one by one, white tail coiled comfortably in his lap.

Pulling her cloak up to hide most of her face Blake shadow-jumped onto a nearby post, somehow even as it sat several metres above the wet ground it still felt waterlogged. "Morning," Blake said blandly, watching in silence as the fishermen's tail snapped around and rippled in agitation as he gasped and turned to stare at her. "Sorry," she added awkwardly.

Patting his chest with a light thump he sighed and said, "Damn girl, be kind to an old timer, my hearings not what it used to be. Guessing you're the Huntresses Ginger and Escuo brought in last night?"

"We are, thank you for letting us stay in the warehouse," Blake said, even as her eyes drifted to the barrel of fish.

Shrugging he answered, "It’s an ugly old place, Mistral said they wanted to turn this place into some kind of outward port city. Then the funding dried up and they left, now we have a big cement box and none of the trade routes they promised. Still, it can have its uses," he shrugged. His brown eyes snapped to hers, possibly after he'd heard her gentle sniffs, and then followed her gaze to the
"Guessing you lost most of your food in the crash?"

"Mostly, do you take Lien?" Blake asked, sliding a few of the square plastic cards from her pockets and flashing both sides to the Faunus.

"I'll take anything so long as I can trade it," he chuckled, taking two of the cards from her hands, "take a few, please, it'll make my job easier. I'd normally be more generous but..." he trailed off, face and shoulders tightening.

Even as she reached down from her perch to pluck her breakfast up Blake watched him. "But?" she queried.

"Well," he coughed, "With griffons in the area no one wants to go out, these are yesterday’s catch and a few lucky ones I got here this morning. Chances are we'll have to tighten our belts for a few days."

"That makes sense, we'll try to avoid adding too much pressure while we’re here, and good luck with your work," Blake said. She waved to the Faunus as he said his goodbyes and then she flickered away, back to silently slink through the wide grimy alleyways and across the wood lined straw roof tops.

Ruby's cape fluttered as powerful sea breeze, thankfully free of the smell of fish, smacked against her form. It was almost nostalgic, the high view, the strong winds, the isolation... 'It's just like visiting mum;' Ruby thought, taking her mother’s rose symbol in her hands and clutching it tightly.

Silver eyes dipping down to the foamy shore and then out across the dark blue sea to the horizon, Ruby sighed. "Things were going really well yesterday mum... We just had a great day on our own little island, Yang make cookies, Blake and I drew, Weiss beat us at beach ball. It kind of reminded me of that time we went to Patches beach when I was little. I still remember how Yang and I thought a big crab was some kind of Grimm," a chuckle slipped from her lips at the memory.

"Dad was so upset when he thought we'd hurt the poor thing, and you were... You were hugging us and... laughing." The 'I think' was the ever silent addendum to her memories. Sucking in a breath and getting the taste of salt etched deeper into her senses Ruby continued. "Anyway, some Griffons showed up, weird I know, they totally messed up our ship, we lost a bunch of our stuff, but we're OK! Plus this town's letting us stay here until we get it fixed, oh Weiss named it Stardust, which was nice."

"You know, with Yang, and Zwei, plus Weiss and Blake in there, Stardust feels a lot more like home than home really did. But I guess that's normal when you're a Hunter and move around a lot." Ruby's lips pressed together, they were dry, not cracked just yet but wind wasn't doing her any favours. Finally she said, "Anyway, once we're done looking in Mistral for dad and Uncle Qrow maybe we'll come back to Patch and I can give you a proper update. For now, well," she shrugged, "I guess we'll just have to see what happens. I'd better get back to fishing, someone's gotta get us dinner, so I guess this is bye for now, mum!"

With that Ruby released the silver symbol attached to her hip and, tensed. There was an instant were the wind, the dust, the clouds, everything seemed to slow down just the smallest fraction. An energy radiated out from her core, through her bones, pumped her veins up and fled her skin, twisting the air around her and-
She was gone, a flood of rose petals following in her wake as Ruby hurtled down from the precipice she'd been standing on. In barely a moment she skidded to a halt at the shoreline, a wind tunnel following after her and crashing against the seas breeze.

Speed was innate to anyone who could use Aura reasonably well. Even an average Hunter was fast enough to deflect standard ammunition. They could run cross country faster than any normal beast lacking the advantage of Aura and do it longer too. Ruby though, was faster, speed was her thing, her 'speciality' like only a few others knew.

Which naturally meant it was very easy for her to cast out two fishing lines in full, jam them into the rocky coast and then shoot across the shoreline and up hills without needing to worry about her catch. 'The moments those lines tug I'll be there,' she thought, 'I just hopes it's not a Deathstalker hiding under the water like at that lake, that was a mess.'

Most of her time fishing had actually been spent exploring her surroundings. The dirty brown and sandy rocks were just riddled with holes, curves, points and dips that kept shallow pools of water in tiny ponds. It was almost fascinating to find water slipping from one rock to another stone, down a tunnel and out of sight, only for to find another connecting cut in the stone moments later. It was like a very strange, kind of pointless, engine. Still, fiddling with the sand and looking in on the local coruscations couldn't keep her occupied for long.

Thus Ruby fell back on what she always did when bored, and had already performed maintenance on Crescent Rose. A Crescent Rose which had come through the battle with the Griffon is pristine condition, 'Do I know engineering or what?' Ruby thought.

With that done she was spending her on scouting, looking through the scope she'd scanned the uneven swamplands passed the village in case of Grimm. Then she'd inspected the town proper. Shorleight was a small place, parked right on a rocky shore with the earth rising up high on its left and right sides.

The houses were almost uniformly wooden and even the older one's didn't look as sturdy as the log cabin she used to call home. 'I guess if it’s fragile, but easy to make, they figure they can rebuild?' Ruby guessed. 'They probably want to keep the good stuff for the boats, those at least look pretty sturdy,' she thought.

Of course that wasn't to the village was small either with maybe about fifty buildings all together, it was fairly modest. Each home clearly stood out on its own, with little of the order or planning they'd seen in some other villages. The only thing Ruby could say that stood out was the size of the houses, ramshackle, a bit rundown and maybe a bit waterlogged they might be, but they were all almost universally large.

'Not many people though,' she observed.

Before Ruby could continue her scouting, she refused to call it stickybeaking no matter what Weiss would say, Ruby heard quick, frumpy footsteps coming up behind her.

"Weiss?" Ruby asked, dropping Crescent Rose and turning to face her friend. Rather than her white jacket, turned dress thanks to Blake's prodigious sewing skill, Weiss was back in her old outfit. It was more tattered than it used to be, especially around the edges of the skit and having lost the jacket she instead wore a loose grey top she'd bought in a village some time ago. Her hair was also done up in its usual side ponytail and she was looking, oddly sparkly if a little red cheeked. "Did you find a shower?"
"No, I used some Burn and Freeze Dust, anyway-"

"Weiss that stuff is important! You can't waste it on cleaning, what if we're in danger?" Ruby chided, her voice rising high.

"I was in danger, my follicles were in danger!" Was Weiss's retort, throwing her arms in the air and stomping her feet even as she grew redder and redder. Folding her arms and huffing Weiss said, "Anyway, I decided I could help best by doing some shopping, Yang's given me a list is there anything you need-"

Ruby's breath hitched-

"Besides bullets," Weiss said firmly. "You still have one ammo box left, you'll be fine for the time being."

Ruby groaned but said, "I can't think of much else, I mean you'll have Dust and stuff on there, same for tools and other supplies. But if you can afford it some bait would be good, and can you bring me back the prices on whatever maintenance equipment they sell here?"

"That shouldn't be a problem, and," Weiss said hastily, "I'll keep ear out for any rumours and talk to the locals."

"Cool, need some company?" Ruby asked.

"I'll be fine thank you, besides I think you're going to be busy enough," Weiss pointed behind her, "Something took your bait."

Blurring around Ruby dashed to the fishing rods shouting, "Get back here fishy!"

Weiss could not say Shorelight was agreeing with her at all so far. Looming wood houses that look like they'd be jammed together with soggy wood. Sea shells, ropes, half melted candles and all sorts of miscellaneous things scattered haphazardly on the streets or draped on the houses. 'There's no order or structure to it!' she thought grumpily. Of course that didn't even touch on the fact the town was generally dark, grungy and rather... dank, even having had mist hang over it when they arrived the night before.

The whole town simply felt worn down, and frankly Weiss was glad she's yet to lose her sharp blue heels. Weiss was similarly grateful she could actually walk in said heels over the most difficult terrain, unlike Ruby during her ill-fated attempt born of a dare. The reason for her gratitude was simple, Shorelight was wet!

Where there were solid paths they were either jagged stone usually connected to a house or a sinking wood walkway. Where there wasn't anything so solid to walk on there was running water, where there wasn't water, there was dirty looking sludge!

'And the locals aren't exactly too friendly either,' a quiet, somewhat uncomfortable voice in her mind noted. Oh they weren't unfriendly, nodding in acknowledgement when they saw her which was fairly standard. 'But there's barely anyone here, it's as lively as one of fathers birthdays,' Weiss thought with a repressed snicker.
Were they hiding because of the Griffons, because outsiders were present? Weiss couldn't say, her only companion was the sloshing sound beneath her feet and the list Yang had typed onto her Scroll in her hand. 'This is just like a horror movie,' Weiss suddenly though as she stepped below a grey roofed house that loomed so large she was engulfed in its shadow.

A little shudder ran through Weiss's spine and she clutched her Scroll to her chest as she glanced around the empty town. 'No transport, our Scrolls aren't working and we're in a mysterious, creepy town with weird art and-

Weiss's increasingly erratic and frantic musing were cut short when a small child with a face covered in grime and dirt shot by her. He had a cheetah's tail that was whipping out wildly and much like the rest of him, it was covered in dirt.

"The treasures mine!" he shouted, laughing as he waved what looked to be a cookie above his head.

Another child, slightly taller and human as far as Weiss could tell ran after him, "Get back here, mum and dad said that was mine!"

The feuding siblings quickly disappeared around a corner, though their squabbles seemed to echo throughout the village. Letting out a sigh of relief Weiss ran a hand through her hand and thought, 'Evil village, how could I be so provincial? Besides, we're Huntresses, we're the last people who'd star in a horror movie.'

Coming to a stop Weiss realised she still had no idea where she was save that there were some building near her and some weird sea shell obelisk in the middle of the, uh, road. Head spinning around she was relieved to spy a vaguely familiar figure walking down the street.

"Oh, Mr Escuo," Weiss called, waving her hands.

The redhead looked up at her and gave a tight smile, "Good morning miss, anything I can help you with?"

"Well I was wondering if you had a, ah, shopping district, or," she started hearing the little rasp of amusement from the man. "A supply depot, or general store?"

"That miss, we do have, I can show you the way," he said. Gesturing to a loosely defined street with ragged, but once colourful, awnings.

As they walked, and Weiss was once again grateful her heels kept the sludge from slipping into her shoes Weiss struck up a conversation. "I just wanted to thank you again, your towns been very good to us."

"Oh it's nothing really," Escuo murmured seemingly embarrassed. "Besides, you four did drive off those Griffons, a mighty big scare it was to see them nearing the isles last night." he glanced down at her, "I hope no true harm came to any of you in that, Griffons are frightful things."

"Oh nothing we couldn't sleep off, the ship is a bit more damaged, but Yang is certain she can fix it," Weiss said casually. Which was a bald faced lie, the look Yang had been giving their missing wing was not an encouraging one.

"That's quite impressive, not to be intrusive but do you have any idea of when that might be?
"Sorry," he chucked, "I'm not so good at small talk."

"Oh you're doing fine," Weiss said, "and I'm afraid I can't say, her technobabble went well above my head." This was an old game Weiss was playing, give a little take a little, exaggerate and flatter, and wheedle, just hoping what you gave wasn't important. Maybe she shouldn't be playing it on a villager who looked so totally lost but she was hardly being mean was she? Smiling Weiss said, "Yang did however say it'd go faster with some larger parts, otherwise she said replacing them will be a hassle, especially with the CCT as it is."

Escuo let out an annoyed grunt, "Those things feel like more trouble than their worth sometime. As soon as it's fixed it breaks again I swear."

"You sound familiar with it," Weiss noted.

"Me? Oh hardly," Escuo laughed, "I'm a book keeper by trade, I've helped with it once or twice though, when Mistral was too busy to send someone, I wasn't needed this time though. Anway here we are!" Escuo said grandly, motioning to a house with an actual brick foundation, but still propped up higher by wooden walls and a cracked tile roof. On all sides massive fire wood logs sat on tarp, though it seemed to be doing little to halt the inevitable water-logging.

"I see, thank you so much Mr Escuo, I don't suppose you'll be joining me?" she asked, motioning towards the door and the sign that read 'closed'.

"Oh damn me," he muttered, "It's already open, see?" he said, pushing on the door which slid open with a creak. He leaned in and flicked on a singular buzzing lamp that illuminated the whole room. "I live here see, but folks generally just came in, take what they need and leave a note. Not much theft in a town as small as this, hehe, cept for kids’ stuff."

"That makes sense, thank you for showing me the way here Mr Escuo," Weiss said, strolling into the store. It was brightly lit but that only enhanced the age of the wood and dusty shelves, their supplies seemed low, with maybe a third of the shelves empty. There was no food to speak of, and scarcely any Dust or scrap steel, a few simple tools, fishing lines and nets lined the walls and little else. 'I can find a few things here, but Yang is going to be disappointed,' Weiss thought.

Bringing a gently clenched hand to her chin Weiss bit her lip and turned to the older man. Once he'd turned to face her from where he was inspecting the lamps Dust levels Weiss said, "I confess, I'm a bit new to all of this. Would you mind if I asked you some questions about the list I was given?" Weiss then put out her hands and said, "I mean, if you're not busy. I imagine there's somewhere you need to be, so I won't keep you."

Escuo's eyes widened and blinked owlishly for a moment before he scratched his neck. "What me? Nowhere I need to be, I'd be happy to help you ma'am." He said, gesturing for her to follow him to the desk near the centre of the room with a battered old cash register and two barrels either side.

"If you're sure, it seems so quiet, I hope we didn't interrupt some sort of ceremony or holiday," Weiss said.

"Oh no," Escuo said blandly, shuffling and tidying some papers on his desk. "The village head was holding a meeting about what to do about the Griffons with our fighters gone but..." he trailed off. "Seeing as your all here there wasn't much to discuss. I figured I should get some paperwork done."
Placing a hand over her heart Weiss said, "I promise we'll do everything we can to help your town Mr Escuo. Though seeing as you mentioned them how long ago did your warriors leave?"

Freezing for a moment Escuo glanced to his side and seemingly scanned a calendar before answering, "About three weeks ago, they should be fine, it's a long trip."

"I can only imagine," Weiss answered before pulling out her Scroll and unveiling the list. "Now I don't suppose you could tell me anything about headlight fluid could you?"

By the time evening rolled around the warehouses was once again inhabited by the entirety of the Knights Errant.

Blake was up high, watching over the town and coast from the window ledges, back pressed against the minute wall, one leg pulled up to her chest and the other dangling off the tiny windowsill.

Weiss, Ruby and Zwei were crouched around a small, traditional wood fire, were the youngest of their number was frying their fish.

Yang however...

"Nooooooo..." She groaned, face to the floor she looked to be bowing towards Stardust like their ship was some ancient deity, looming over her in judgement.

"You're being too dramatic, you know how to fix it," Blake murmured.

"I could know how to build a Battleship and it wouldn't help," Yang said, throwing her head back and waving at the ship. "I can't fix a blown off wing with no supplies and practically no equipment! I mean, the Gravity Dust is fine, but the fitted slot is mangled, half the connectors were torn out and the liquidator is all gone, and then there’s the coolant and then there’s the dinged up engine and- arg I hate Griffons!"

"Yang come here and eat, you'll feel better, "Ruby offered, "I made the Rose-Xiao Long family special, fried fish!" Then Ruby giggled, "it’s one of the only things I can cook."

"It'll taste great Ruby," Yang said, even as she slumped towards the meal and dropped down. There was no small amount of grease, grime and speckles of Dust covering her body and Yang had been forced to put her hair in a loose ponytail to get it out of the engine.

As she took her plate Yang tried to wipe a dirt smudge from her cheek, the one Blake and Weiss kept glancing at. But she just felt the grime spreading and so she simply sighed and bit into her crackling oily meal, a small moan of pleasure escaping her lips at the taste. 'At-least fattening food still tastes good,' she thought. "Thanks for dinner Ruby, good idea," she said, patting Ruby's head.

"Blake come join us," Weiss ordered as she tried and failed to eat with some dignity and restraint but mostly just ended up hacking at the cod Ruby had caught for them throughout the day.

"I'm pretty full already but..." Blake trailed off, "I guess I could eat," she added. Darting down to their sides Blake scooped up some of the fish from the flat cooking slab and placed them on her green camping plate before returning to her watch post.
"Do we really need a watch guys?" Ruby asked, "I mean, I know last night as kind of a mess but this town seems nice."

"Maybe, but I'd rather be ready, this town is worrying me," Blake said.

" Anything we need to know about or just the usual low-key 'I'm a fugitive' worry?" Yang asked, dodging Weiss's lazy swipe for speaking with her mouth full.

"No not that, if they know, or care, I didn't overhear anything today but there just seems to be... a quiet dread in this town, it's too quiet," Blake said. Blake bit into her meal and nodded, "Thank you for dinner Ruby."

"I have to agree with Blake," Weiss said, before turning to Ruby, "On the meal and the town," she elaborated.

"Arf!" Zwei barked, barely lifting his head up from his meal.

"Yay one hundred percent approval rating, thanks guys!" Ruby cheered.

"Things here are very run down and apparently the fighters they sent out to fix up the CCT haven't come back yet. And I know the CCT Support Tower map, I've looked at it dozens of time and I know it shouldn't have taken them this long even if Mistral has lost interest."

"Should it have though, I thought the kingdoms were meant to look out for that kind of thing?" Ruby queried.

"They are," Blake said, "but the kingdoms are supposed to do a lot of things they don't. In the end it all comes down to the bottom line, though it is odd, if anywhere was going to be cut off why here?"

"Exactly," Weiss said, beaming proudly at their group's steady deduction. "This is an decent flight path to Vale, if anywhere was going to be maintained it should be here. Though with the main towers within the kingdom's it's less of a communication concern but it still feels rather impractical."

Gulping down the last bit of her meal Yang said, "So are we thinking the warriors got lost or taken out by Grimm and the village don't want to tell anyone?"

"Or maybe there was a fight between some villages and they don't want to tell anyone?" Weiss suggested. "Those happen right?" she asked, glancing at Blake.

"Sometimes but rarely, usually there's too much space between them for something like that to be worth it, let alone the Grimm," she answered.

"Maybe the Support Tower was just really damaged," Ruby added. "Though really, I want to help these people if we can but if they don't want to tell us if somethings wrong."

"Which we don't even know if it is," Yang cut in.

"Then we really can't do much," Ruby finished.

"Which brings us back to having no reception and unless there's something to salvage nearby, a
"busted Stardust," Yang groaned.

"Wait," Blake murmured, "I hear someone coming."

Ruby and Weiss edged closer to their weapons, just in case. Blake always had hers on her person and Yang, she frowned at her bare wrists but clenched her fists. Finally a slow shuffling hit their ears and a gentle knock rang out through from the metal door at the warehouses front. "Good evening, is everyone decent?" a weathered voice asked.

"Yes, we were just sitting down for dinner, one moment!" Yang called. She strode towards the door and after glancing back to get the go ahead from the others lifted the metal roller up to reveal a tiny frame wrapped up in a weather beaten coat and hat. "Wow, were you all right climbing all the way up here?" Yang asked, offering her arm for the elderly figure.

She was however gently denied as they chuckled and said, "I may be old but I've lived here my whole life, ah I used to climb up here as a child," they chucked. Yang could barely make out their shining amber eyes and only the tattered tail swishing at the back hinted at the person's nature. Everything else was hidden beneath the cloak and hat.

"It didn't have the warehouse back then of course, everyone was too busy fighting each other to build anything," they added.

"Wow, you must be really old!" Ruby gasped.

Yang and Blake mutually repressed a groan at Ruby's lack of social grace while Weiss placed a hand over her friend's mouth. "Sorry about that sir, er, ma'am, "Weiss guessed."

"It's ma'am if you prefer, though at my age one can hardly tell, ohohoho." Shaking her head the woman continued, "I am the village head, and after Escuo came to me today and told me of your situation I believe I can offer you something useful," they said.

"Oh?" Yang said, unable to hide her interest as she grinned down at the figure.

"Yes, as I understand it," the village head waved at their ship, "You're going to be in the market for some rather heavy metals. No one around here sells such things but salvage is always an options and it just so happens a rather large ship crashed not far from here."

"What kind of ship, and wouldn't it have been stripped for parts, unless it was recent? If you don't mind me asking," Yang said.

Waving their hand the elder answered, "Not at all and it was an Atlesian Battleship-"

"What!?" Weiss screeched, shooting to her feet. "When did it crash, were there any survivors?"

Balking a little in shock the village head shook and said, "It was over a year ago now, and, I am sorry to say, we met no survivors."

"Oh, a year ago, that's... well, thank you for telling me," Weiss said, one hand pressed to her heart.

"If it crashed so long ago why didn't you or anyone else salvage?" Blake asked.

"Heck, how come Atlas didn't come and get it? I know I'd be pretty upset if I lost something with
those high impact laser cannons!" Ruby added.

"As to Atlas I cannot say, we expected them to arrive soon, but no one ever came, as for us," the Village head shrugged. "A rather nasty Beowolf pack moved in shortly afterwards and its far enough away that while they don't bother us, getting our warriors out there, getting anything back while fighting them off..." they trailed off, "it simply wasn't practical. You four however are Huntresses, I don't doubt it would be within your capabilities."

"Wow, that's quite a tip, thanks!" Yang cheered.

"I confess I am not complete unselfish, if you'd be so kind as to perhaps bring us back a few material you don't need we'd great appreciate it. Though in truth getting rid of that Beowolf pack would be enough. They used to leave this area alone but the Grimm presence here has been growing recently, as you experienced yourselves," they grumbled.

Rising to her feet Ruby thumped her fist against her chest and said, "Don't worry, the Knights Errant are on the case!"

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to Shorelight, a town inspired by Person With Many Aliases giving me some pics from Bloodborne. I hope this was a fun read, as always I would like to thank everyone who has read, liked, faved and commented, as well as thank Person With Many Aliases and recently Always Late to the Party, for their help with the last chapter.
Scrolls were amazing devices, even when cut off from the CCT. With one a person could watch stored shows, play games, do their taxes, chat at short distance, make recordings, music and art, and even use them as projectors. Yang was utilising her Scroll for just that in fact.

A soft blue light was shining up on the bare cement wall of their temporary residence. In the centre of the projection was a massive arrow headed ship that looked to be drifting against a simulated skyline. Six elegant tail fins stretched out, moving in slow swishes, twin box engines on either side of a smooth cylindrical rectangle making up the command centre.

"All right listen up!" Yang said as she marched back and forth beneath the projected battleship, a thin piece of metal pipe in her hands. "We are dealing with the new Class One Atlesian battleships, and those things are top of the line, top of the line!" she added for emphasis.

Before Yang sat the rest of her team, each one, including Zwei, was sitting on the floor before her watching with varying degrees of patience or interest. Ranging from Ruby's rapt attention to Blake's usually unreadable face, Zwei's excitement or Weiss's odd mix of actual interest and her arched brow of cynicism.

With a snap of her wrist she cracked the steel beam against the wall, just stopping short of breaking it. "These new models came out little more than a year ago and all of Atlas's battleships have been upgraded just like the one we're going after," Yang said.

Sliding the tip of her steel pointer up to the top-most part of the ship Yang spoke. "This here is the hull. Its divided into two primary segments, one which actually allows for crew members near the centre, as you can see by these little windows." Yang stared down at everyone to make sure they were all still listening. "Primarily, though it’s heavily armoured to defend against aerial attacks and stores the majority of the ship's Dust. From here it pumps that into the ship from all different the sectors. Each mixture is clustered together and subdivided by type, positions, flow and necessity."

"Ooh, ooh," Ruby muttered as she began fidgeting, rocking from side to side, as she clutched her ankles and tapped her knees to the floor.

"Yes Ruby," Yang said, a sigh that was some mixture of fondness and bemusement escaping her lips. "The hull is also where the laser cannons are located. It’s mostly for long rang strikes, there's shield generators as well but they can only withstand so much," she said.

Yang dragged her steel-pipe down and drew a circle on the curved, white steel box with a dozen or so large windows. "This section is the command centre. It houses the primary computers that let Atlas have such minute management over their droids and doubles as a final kill switch for them if necessary. Beyond that long range radios, radars, advanced scanners, holo-maps with adaptable touch screens and--"

"Excuse me," Weiss said, coughing into her hand.

"Yes?" Yang drawled, arching a golden eyebrow at the newest interrupter.

"Do we actually need to know all of this, or is this just you showing off?" Weiss asked.
"It’s very important we know what we're dealing with Weiss. Now, as I was saying," Yang continued, slapping her pointed against the four giant grey steel boxes, two sitting on either side of the command centre. "These are the primary jets, the ship has twenty four in this section alone and each individual one is larger than our Stardust's primary engine jets."

A goofy grin spread on her lips and Yang continued, "See these are actually really cool because of the nacelle. It concentrates the force of the jet engines. The nacelle also tie into creating the Dust mixture that fuels the jet engines, all of which is made just before ignition at high speeds! They do that so even if there's damage to the ship, it will isolate any Dust instability explosions and lessen the chance of large scale damage in the case of a crash."

Dragging her pointer down to the long, elegant and sharply pointed tail fins Yang continued her lecture. "Now see these tail fins are really cool. Not only do they connect to the primary gravity-engine and guide the ship, but see here?" She asked, pointing a little more than halfway down the fins, where a faint emerald glow and a small jet could be made out. "The secondary half of the fin can actually fold up and the entire ship can go into a high speed ramming mode, it’s not malleable but it is powerful!"

Blake raised her hand in one smooth motion.

"Yes Blake!" Yang cheered, finally someone was respecting from class etiquette!

"So what does this mean for our mission, if you don't mind me asking?" She said.

Sighing a little Yang said, "I am trying to give you guy’s proper context, but fine if you want to rush things..." Yang flicked her pointed back to the nacelles. "Weiss you and I are gonna be working on the engines. We'll start with these if there's anything left. Then we'll move onto the fins if there's nothing left to work with. More than anything, we need jet engines and metal we can forge, before we can even think about getting Stardust into flying shape."

"Wait shouldn't it be Ruby or Blake helping you?" Weiss nearly screeched.

"Ignoring the fact you offered to be my little assistant?" Yang asked coyly, smirking at the smaller Huntress and sending a wink her way.

"It was apprentice," Weiss huffed, "And yes ignoring that, since when did you become an expert on Atlesian battleships?" Weiss asked, her tone going back to normal as she cupped her chin and looked at Yang quizzically.

Shrugging Yang said, "Once I became our head mechanic I started doing more reading. Besides," she grinned, her eyes almost flashing red, "Can you imagine what I could do with an engine like that?"

"I can!" Ruby cheered.

"I'm a little scared to wonder," was Weiss's answer.

"Mission?" Blake pressured.

"Right, right," Yang answered, nodding at her friend. "Anyway I need Ruby and Blake to scout the wreckage for supplies and try to gather up and strong sheets of metal, piping, wiring, that kind of stuff. These ships are freaking huge though and chances are they'll be pretty dark, hence the ladybug duo."

"High five to us!" Ruby cheered, her hand clapping against Blake's own as the taller Huntress
grinned at Ruby's exuberance.

"I... see," Weiss said, her words rigid and almost mechanical. "So we'll be harvesting the engine?"

"Yep, I'll inspect them, you'll be draining coolant, Dust and whatever liquidator we can find and- oh don't look at me like that, just wear gloves," Yang cut in over Weiss's mounting protests. "Once we have everything we need we come back and start trying to beat everything into shape. Fortunately all airships use the same style of material and components, just specialised for different fields or sizes. That means," she said slowly, "that everything on this ship will be compatible with ours. Well," she shrugged, 'except for size, but that's nothing a little fire and elbow grease can't fix."

"Yang?" Ruby asked, raising her hand.

"Yes baby sister?" Yang said.

"I can still check if the cannons are working right?" Ruby asked, an excited glint in her silver eyes.

"I’d be disappointed if you didn't!" Yang cheered. Throwing her arms out as Ruby squealed and jumped at her for a hug.

"Think we're doomed?" Blake whispered to Weiss, a little smirk playing on her lips as the white haired woman held her face in her hands.

"Only mostly," Weiss groaned, even as she rose to her feet as Yang and Ruby started loading up their bags and hip pouches with tools.

"All-right Huntresses!" Yang said with a clap of her hands, a massive grin on her face, "You all know the drill, let's tool up, and go shopping."

Plans made and equipment gathered, it wasn't long before the 'Knights Errant' were off. They'd only needed to run by the village heads cabin to explain Zwei would be guarding their ship and they were off.

They moved as four, the ground a constant blur beneath their feet.

Blake and Ruby at the front, sharp eyes and blades ready to find and quickly engage with whatever came their way. Weiss herself was in the middle, her free hand held close to her heard to help her focus in case her team needed an emergency Glyph. Yang was bringing up the rear. Without her Ember Celica the blonde had would have struggled to keep pace with them on a good day. She was however compensating by slamming her feet into the less than solid ground, unleashing a shock wave of Aura into the ground and cannon balling herself forwards to keep up.

'It's just lucky this place isn't exactly great for free running,' Weiss thought as Yang nearly passed her again. There was a tightness to her lips largely unfamiliar to Weiss. Yang's lilac eyes staring pointedly at Ruby's flickering cape.

The dark brown rocky shoreline faded from view almost immediately. What greeted the Huntresses after that was a vase expanse of land. Weiss's nose wrinkled at the odd smells and musty texture of the place. The landscape was layered with dark green moss, thick yellowing grass, smoky waters and an odd mix of spindly and bulbous trees in all shapes, twists and sizes.

"I thought this area was supposed to be a swamp, why is it so bare?" Weiss called out to their resident survival expert.
"You make it sound like you want a swamp," Yang called out over the wind, a tense but cheery laugh filling the air.

The faint shimmer of a shadow rippled off Blake's body like fractal, particles. Slowing down just enough so that she was only single foot or so in front of Weiss, Blake answered. "Lots of Mistral is swampland, further south and it'd be nothing but that. Here we're closer to its frigid north though, so while there's lakes and water bodies it's really more of a wet land."

"I see some forest over there!" Ruby called, lowering Crescent Rose and not even breaking her stride.

"I never said there weren't forests, just that it's mostly wetlands, a lot less claustrophobic, less cover too," Blake said.

"So think we'll be seeing the ship soon?" Yang asked even as they began to fly ahead of her forcing the brawler to launch herself forward again leaving another crater behind her.

"Well," Blake drew out as she and Ruby cast their eyes forward. "I'd say soon, that outline doesn't look like its part of any tree I'd recognise."

"Ooh I see it, the hulls sticking up out of the ground!" Ruby shouted.

Glancing at one another for the brief moment they stood side by side Weiss and Yang cast their gazes out and squinted. The light reflecting from the pools of water and through the clouds made for a strangely luminescent feel that left it hard for her to see. However as they sped along the wetlands Weiss, and she heard Yang hum in acknowledgement as well, finally spied the ships wreckage.

Still far off but drawing closer every second, two segments of the ship were clearly visible. The, Yang had called it the hull, was a massive, insanely long shaft of dark metal. It did not lay flat but instead seemed half buried in the ground on the left with its thinner tip resting atop what looked like a hill, letting it angle above the tree line. The second fraction of the ship were the tail fins. Weiss could see only two of the long, sharply curved wings and near as she could tell they'd been blasted off the ship itself and were now jutting out of the ground like towers.

"I see Beowolves, about forty, and two are Alphas!" Ruby called.

"Got it!" Blake called.

"Affirmative!" Weiss said.

"Get-em sis!" Yang shouted.

Confirmation received, Ruby flared her cape and a wave of rose petals shot forth around her as she threw out her legs and seemingly flee over the ground. Brandishing Crescent Rose, Weiss's eardrums were assaulted by the painfully loud blasts of Ruby firing. Three shots rushed passed them and towards the loose tree line mounted on raised dirt ridges.

One bullet tore through a tree sending its shattering remains spiralling into the air. Even still the twitch of Blake's ears said there was a yelp. The second and third Weiss couldn't follow but the sudden outbreak of angry howls told her that the plan was working.

Just as they approached the massive dirt rises, which Weiss saw how some had jagged metal spikes jutting from them along with trees and their roots. A mass of Beowolves hurled themselves over the boundary, simple masks stark against their pitch black frames as they bared their teeth and
claws.

Weiss chuckled as she flicked her left palm up and sent two fingers into the air. Beneath the leaping Beowolves paws a Glyph sprung, launching them into the air. Where upon Blake shadow-jumped after them, Gambol Shroud flashing as the cloaked Faunus sliced through them in a maelstrom of steel.

As the Beowolves bits rained down upon them, Ruby's bullets were unleashed again. Two shots fired, one tearing through a cluster of five Beowolves and leaving their bisected bodies to hit the ground, confused grunts the last sounds they ever made. The second shot only skimmed a lean looking Alpha. Like its kin the Beowolf was quite plain, only standing out due to the extra-long spikes on its arms and its height. Barely ducking Ruby’s attack in time, the Beowolf let out a mournful howl as an ear and skull fragments was tore from its head.

Letting out a vicious roar, Yang lunged at the Alpha. She brought her left arm up and slammed it against the Alpha's paw strike. Hair flaring gold her strength was greater than its and the Alpha's guard was thrown wide open. Not missing a beat, Yang sent a right hook straight into its throat, the force of her blow tore straight through the Grim's body and tore its head from its shoulders.

Battering their way past the remainders within an instant they leapt over the dirt mound only to see the twenty or so remaining Beowolves fleeing into the woods. A single Alpha howling for retreat, that was, until Ruby's sniper fire blew its head open and left it falling backwards. Heeding their Alpha's last command the Beowolves continued their retreat and soon they were left with an empty crash site.

"Well, isn't that a thing," Yang murmured at her side, staring at the gargantuan mass of steel half buried in the earth.

It only became clear to Weiss now that the dirt mounds they’d clambered over had all been caused by the shock wave of the crash. There was a steep drop down into what could only be described as a crater and there were only a few faint streams of water or puddles running through it. Beyond that the area was nearly bone dry where they were, nothing but dark brown dirt and some struggling grass patches.

The ship itself was a colossus, even partially buried in the ground, with scattered fragments laying around the literally torn in half ship. They were all but ants before the once great fortress. The hull was completely separated from the rest of the ship, like it had been blasted apart. Still wedged in the ground and angled up the mass of black steel stretched on for what felt like an age, surrounded on all sides by risen dirt.

The softly curved command centre was in absolute shreds. Torn in half with one half still attacked to the hull and the other half submerged in the dirt. Panels had been torn and carved to shreds, screens and consoles were burnt out and the windows shattered, making it clear what section of the ship had suffered the Beowolves wrath. The tail fins and engines with the... Nacelles, Weiss recalled, clicking her fingers as they slowly approached the downed ship, had been split off like the wings and lay scattered in the ruins.

Weiss's distant musing were brought to an end as she drew closer to the ship and saw the faint remnants of bones, partially submerged in the ground but still visible. Each of them was careful not to tread on them and before Weiss even knew it she could feel a tight frown forming on her face, as she tried to fall into her impassive mask.

"Hey, you OK?" Blake asked.
Yang patted her shoulder and Ruby was looking at her with obvious concern in her big silver eyes.

Eyes flashing to her friends, then the wreckage then back Weiss felt a small tremor, though whether it was pain of embarrassment she couldn't even begin to say. Clenching and un-clenching her hands she finally said, "Its fine really. Well, no, not fine, but we've done this before and I didn't know anyone here so it’s just uncomfortable, I can't imagine what brought them down or what..." she waved her hands at the wreckage and its lingering signs of battle, "All of this was like, but still, I'm fine," she said.

Each of her friends glanced at one another before finally nodding. Not releasing her shoulder Yang used her free hand to finger gun Blake and Ruby. "All right you two know the drill?"

"Go in, look for supplies and salvage metal," Blake said off by rote.

Saluting Ruby said, "And check out the systems, see if anything is still working!"

"Awesome," Yang said, clicking her fingers. "One addition though, look around for small airships, there might be a Specialist class transport, or a Bullhead."

Seeing their looks it was Weiss who spoke up. "Its a small chance I know, but battleships can carry smaller ships for faster deployment in the field and they may be inside the wreck, I mean, it is big enough."

Glancing at each other and nodding Blake and Ruby said, "We'll keep an eye out," before turning and marching off towards the torn open command centre buried in the ground.

Weiss felt a thump on her back as Yang guided her away and over to the first boxy looking jet engine. "All right Weiss, let’s cut these puppies open and check for fuel!"

"Are you sure I can't go with them?" Weiss mumbled, even as she stepped ever closer to the towering steel engine.

Ruby glanced around the streamlined steel hallways of the crashed ship, as she and Blake's footfalls clanged resoundingly through the Scroll illumined hallway. After only a brief glance at the main control room at the top of the wreck they'd declared it a waste of time.

To say that there was nothing salvageable left was an understatement, what hadn't been burnt, had been ripped; what hadn't been blasted, had been torn out and crushed. Knowing a lost cause when they saw one, they'd descended into the ship proper. The lights were naturally broken or just plain gone, hence the Scroll lights.

"You know, I kind of wish I could see in the dark," Ruby said as she shined her Scroll into a spartan room while Blake inspected the room across the hall.

A laugh murmured in Blake's throat before she said, "It does have its advantages yes. Though I can't imagine anyone you'd have your sights lined up on at night would appreciate it."

"Then they're being sore losers," Ruby huffed, letting Crescent Rose, in its gun form, knock against her shoulders as she inspected the room.

The doors had been open when they'd come down and thus inspecting each room from storage, to soldiers quarters was proving relatively simple, if dull in Ruby's opinion. 'You'd think with all the money they blew on this thing they'd at least make it look interesting,' Ruby thought.

Uniform white steel with the Atlas and SDC logos plastered practically everywhere the soldier’s
quarters had no personality. Cramped, with the ceiling literally curving in for space, maybe half a metre of floor space. The bed was pressed against the wall and a tiny indent for a mattress and below it was a set of draws and cupboard.

The holo-projector on the wall was a nice touch, and there was at least a little space for personal effect and stuff like weapons and armour. But still, even if Ruby could appreciate engineering for efficiency she was confident she'd have gone stir crazy trapped inside that little box.

"Anything in yours?" Blake asked.

Sighing and letting her head droop so that her hair hung over her face Ruby shook her head. "Nope, the cupboards were all scratched up and empty, do you think the blast took it out, or the crew managed to evacuate and just didn't go by Shorelight?"

Blake hummed, lips thinning as she adopted what Ruby dubbed the Faunus's 'thinking face'. Ears twitching, she tapped the floor with her hard sole shoes, creating a loud clang that echoed and bounced around the halls before fading away. Finally her nearly shining amber eyes glanced at Ruby and Blake said, "That's possible I guess, but we'll need to keep looking, but... keep an ear out."

"Isn't that your speciality?" Ruby giggled as she followed after Blake, her only answer being the faintest twitch of Blake's feline ears.

"I am a Schnee, I know how Dust-Tubes work," Weiss said, persisting in her one sided squabble, even as Yang ignored the former heiress and continued to help her. Yang's hands overlaid Weiss's as she helped the smaller Huntress keep a Dust-Tube steady. Together they pressed the containers extruded lips against a matching indent of metal on the side of the engines.

"Now we twist," Yang said, as Weiss spun the tube and it locked in against the valves with a clunk. "Awesome, now just link it up with your Scroll and try to get a reading on how much Dust is left and what type. Once we have them all checked or you find what we need you can start draining!"

"I understand," Weiss said, nodding her head and staring at the tube as if daring it to fall from its place at near the base of the engines secondary fuel connectors.

"Well, while you do that," Yang said, clapping her hands, "I'm gonna go check out the engines proper and pick out my new faves." Yang slipped away from Weiss and began marching towards the next nearest nacelle that she'd found half buried in the ground.

'Poor things, lying here all neglected with the Grim, I'll make sure you find a good home.'

Reaching into her brown hip pouches Yang pulled out one of her surviving tools and an old purchase from Vale. Namely, a trusty 'Steel Cutter' knife. Spinning it in her fingers Yang grinned, she'd had the same knife fighting lessons as everyone else and stilled toyed with on occasion, but her little tool was designed with more than battle in mind. Sending a wave of her Aura through the knives surface Yang watched it take on a red hot glow while the air around it wavered from the heat.

Carefully she pressed the blade-tip against the thin tear in the engine nacelles and pulled against the torn steel. With her considerable strength and her knives heat, the metal squealed and tore under her blades touch. Yang used her free hand to pull the loosening sheet back as liquid metal dribbled against her Aura before dropping onto the ground.
Lilac eyes opened wide as Yang dragged back the metal that screeched under her touch and she was greeted by an empty shell of steel, only a few torn wires and a cracked coolant system remained. Where there should have been a gargantuan piece of curved steel, with connectors and pipes running into it, there was only empty space.

"No, freaking way," Yang ground out as she stepped back.

'This is wrong,' Blake thought, feeling Ruby's cloak brush up against her side. Amber eyes spiralled out all around her, but found only more nondescript hallways and ruined metal. With every step down the slanted hallway, Blake could feel and hear the thrum of hollow metal ringing out when it should not be there.

Blake was a Faunus, she could see in the dark, hear better than Ruby ever could, and had spent her life in the shadows and yet... 'Something's wrong, it's just, I can't find it,' she thought. The faint whine of scraping metal travelled through the air, distorting her perception further.

"Ruby," Blake murmured.

"Yeah," she said quietly, cocking her gun as Blake slid Gambol Should into her hands.

"If we run into something be prepared for a tough fight, but," Blake tensed, "Try to be careful with your shots."

"I know," Ruby said, nodding, "Don't wanna accidentally blow a hole in the ship."

'Or hit someone,' was Blake's thought.

That was when she heard a skittering along the floor, something heavy and swift sliding along the metal. "Behind!" Blake spun around, pointing to the right end of the hallway just as a set of glowing red eyes appeared.

With a powerful clank Crescent Rose fired just as the Beowolf sped around the corner to lunge at them. The Grim didn't get far, the bullet impacting against its chest, digging in deep before tearing through leaving a head sized hole in its chest before burying itself in the wall.

Glancing at Ruby Blake almost laughed, "That was being careful?"

"Well, for me," Ruby chuckled.

Blake heard it before she felt the rush of air behind her. A cry of warning leaving her lips as she shadow-jumped up. But just before her feet could touch the roof, 'Not enough space!' a white mask flashed in her vision, red eyes shone and a clawed palm slammed into her chest with a force that reminded Blake of Yang's own strikes!

"Oof!" Eyes wide Blake found launched back, smacking against the reinforced steel and then straight through it with a metallic cry as her world blurred.

"Hyaaa!" Ruby jumped away from their attacker, it wasn't an Alpha, too many bones, too thick, the mask was vastly more detailed and its muzzle longer. She bared Crescent Rose and fired but the Grim ducked beneath the shot and rushed her.

Ruby lunged into the air and over the Grim, only for the Beowolf to flip over and slam its paws into the floor and flipped itself over to slam its feet into her unguarded back.
Ruby felt the air flee her lungs as she was sent smashing through the nearest wall and into a band of Alphas.

The distant sounds of monstrous howl and Blake's gunfire drowned out as the Grim pounced at her.

"Harvested?" Weiss balked, "But who beat us here?"

"No clue," Yang spate, her hair already glowing, "but the engines completely freaking gone. I'm amazed there was even a frame left, this place has to be a honey trap, we gotta-"

A deep howl, no, more like an alien chorus of howls forced into one, rang out from the battleship.

"Ruby!" Yang roared, but just as she made to move a black tide tore from the woodlands on all sides, overtaking the vessel and converging on the two huntresses.

Something exploded out from inside the ship as Weiss unveiled her weapon. Conjuring a wave of Glyph around them she sent the first few dozen hurtling backwards or into the air with confused yelps. A single sword thrust later and with a sharp crackling sound Weiss had conjured a wall of ice on one side, stalling some the Grim even as more came at them.

As Weiss let loose a blast of fire Yang instinctively tried to trigger Ember Celica and let out a guttural snarl at her bare wrists.

"Yang I can't keep them off us, I need-" Weiss started.

Yang howled as she grabbed the towering engine at her side, a wave of her Aura flashed from her body like a spreading flame across dry grass, consuming her and the steel. Hefting the mass of metal over her shoulder Yang bellowed as she hurled it at a pack of Beowolves, the first dozens heads being torn off from the force.

It wasn't enough. Soon both Huntresses were being swarmed by a snarling mass of claws and gnashing teeth.

Slashing into the darkness, Ruby found Crescent Rose slowed, only marginally by the wall, but it was enough for her target to throw itself out of the way. Before she could correct her strike another Beowolf slammed against the shaft, stopping her swing as it wrapped its arms around Crescent Rose.

Ruby's eyes flared wide as she saw a third figure lunge at her. A blast of air hit her an instant before the Beowolf. Ruby squeezed the trigger, and flung herself back. With a yelp the Alpha holding Crescent Rose flipped through the air. But she wasn't fast enough to escape her attacker. Ruby felt the Beowolf's maw clamp around her neck. Aura flaring and straining, Ruby let out a pained gasp as dozen of barbed teeth pressed against her throat.

Their jump led them to smashing through a wall and the Beowolf's arms surrounded her, claws ready to dig into her spine. Ruby flung Crescent Rose up and the ship rang out with the sound of gun fire as she threw herself into a spin as the blast flung her down. Crashing against the Beowolf and slamming them into the floor the momentary shock running through its frame was enough. Ruby leapt off the snarling beast only to crash into another wall.

Hearing its fellows behind her Ruby fired a shot from Crescent Rose, it tore through the roof and with a downwards pulse of her Aura she was blasted through the floor. Ruby's boots slammed against a Beowolf's back, cratering its body into the darkened floor. Red eyes and snarls seemed to
come from all sides and Ruby knew she had no choice. Throwing Crescent Rose back she fired just as the first claws tore at the back of her head, barely kept back by her Aura.

A propulsive wave of Aura burst from her, signalled by a shower of rose petals. Ruby could feel the air breaking under her charge, her Aura rippling with the force as she batted her way past her attackers in a bid to escape the confined quarters.

'I just hope Blake's OK!' Ruby thought as she blasted through the wall and finally felt fresh air against her skin. Only to gape at the snarling mass of Grim swarming the crash site. 'So that's where they all came from,' she thought, realising there was no way a hallway of the Grim could have hidden from them.

A loud bark struck her ears from behind and as she hung in the air in that tiny instantaneous moment where gravity had yet to exert its pull she looked back. One of the Alphas was lunging at her, claws and teeth bared and practically glinting in the sun.

Ruby grinned, the sounds of fire and smashing told her Yang and Weiss were still fighting and didn't need a rescue, yet. Throwing Crescent Rose in front of her Ruby fired. Another flex of her Semblance and the air around her parted as she torpedoed herself straight into the Alpha's chest. Jamming the tip of Crescent Rose's handle into its eye, Ruby jumped off its decaying form just as she sent the Grim colliding into its kin.

'It's an all new game now,' Ruby thought, descending upon them again, Crescent Rose raised high, rose petals flying and her cape framing her form and blocking the sun as her silver eyes glinted.

A metallic clang rang out across the field, over the roars of the Beowolves. Yang swung her improvised steel beam club and batted another gaggle of Beowolves away, only for another band to jump her from the left.

They crashed against Weiss's Glyphs, but she was already sending ice daggers into another group and more were charging from her left!

Yang spun around and with a titanic heave, Aura rippling out of her skin like fire from a blast, she slammed her fists into the ground. A massive rumbling of earth roared, fire lines spread across the shock-wave as it hurtled into the Grim and sent them flying.

"Watch out!" Weiss snapped, swinging her sword over Yang's head and unleashing a gout of fire on a lunging Alpha and its pack who howled as they were blasted back, engulfed in red.

"You too!" Yang shouted, kicking off from the ground and slamming her steel beam downward, crushing a few stunned Bowolves and throwing the rest back.

In an instant, without even turning, they both met their next attackers.

Weiss's Glyph sprung to life, tiny and minuscule enough for just one elegant heel to slip through at ramming speeds, impaling the Beowolves throat on her heel.

Yang merely threw back her right arm and felt it crack against the mask of a Grim. Its pained yelp before the tell-tale sounds of disintegration, like ash rustling, hit hear ears.

Casting their gases around, they saw no end to the horde and steeled themselves for the oncoming waves.
Blake could see in the dark, it should have held no fear for her. 'But this things is so fast, and so quiet!' She thought, ears straining atop her head to make out its movements. However with the chaos inside and outside the ship and the sharp, angular, spiked form of the Beowolf had been stalking her through the ship.

Blake knew she could try tearing her way out, but all the movement and the Grim's speed left her wary. 'Try for an escape and land in a trap, or hope it loses patience and retake momentum,' she thought. Either way Blake knew it was a bad choice, too much risk.

The uniformly white metal walls stayed to form wherever she went. However as Blake walked in a slow crouch, Gambol Shroud in hand, she was seeing more and more degradation. Anything that looked important had been wrenched off, walls had been cut open and left empty, and the floors torn to shreds by the Grim.

'This wasn't just them though,' Blake thought at the obviously rushed but all too controlled cuts in the nearly hollow wall.

A subtle shift in the air, something had kicked up dust, she could smell it. Sliding around silently Blake cast her gaze back down the hallway only to find it bare, 'Behind!' Blake twisted her head back but still nothing.

Her ears twitched, a whoosh shot towards her and Blake lashed out with Gambol Shroud. A thin bar of metal was bisected in an instant but- 'Shit!'

Blake shadow-jump deeper into the hallways as the Alpha exploded through the wall bare inches from where she'd been.

Snarling the coyote skulled Grim kicked off from the floor, bending the reinforced steel. Drawing its arm back and baring its extruding blade-boned arm the snarling beast slashed at Blake.

Jumping Blake felt the swipe graze her boots, her Aura slid from her core and oozed into her sword like liquid.

The Alpha's jaw shot up to snap around her neck and Blake sent herself lurching out of a shadow and back.

The Dust in Gambol Shroud hissed and churned with renewed energy. Her amber eyes shot wide as it lunged after her, paws outstretched, no hint of confusion on its snarling visage.

The wall approached, the Alpha was closing in - she wasn't fast enough - too much uncertainty. The hall flashed in her peripherals and Blake flung herself left, kicking off from the floor and spinning into a low stance. Gambol Shroud pulled down at her side and radiating with energy.

The wall ruptured at her side as the Alpha exploded forth, towering over her. Blake spun, she felt its armoured skull crash against her chest and they tore through the wall. With a desperate heave as the monsters claws clamped around her blade Blake let loose a surge of Aura.

Her shadows writhed and thrashed as violet energy exploded into the sword and with gritted teeth she brought Gambol Shroud up. The Aura flared and the Beowolf tried to throw itself back as sharp, writhing energies exploded in its grasp. Blake saw its thumb fly past her and like a violet flame her sword beam slashed along the monsters chest and sent it crashing through the ceiling.

Flipping herself over and bounding into the air, through the gaping hole in the ceiling, Blake raced after her quarry.
The Grim yowled as she unleashed a tide of bullets on its back as it tried to escape her sights. But each leap it took Blake followed, each metal pane it ripped through Blake followed.

As they burst onto the ships deck, two younger Alphas lunged at her, as their senior skidded along the floor, nails scratching along the steel as it pulled itself to a halt.

The Beowolves leapt at her as one, shielding their leader, but Blake merely flicked a small switch on the base of her blade. Another flood of Aura burst into Gambol Shroud and she slashed down in a massive overhead strike. The Dust and her Aura sparked and then exploded in a mass of violet light, ice and air, forming a purple cloud that crashed against the Grim like an explosion. Tiny icy shrapnel slashed at their frames as they crashed into their Alpha and exploded out of the ship and into the daylight.

Flinging herself forward Blake half watched their descent, the Beowolves crashed against one of the ships wings and began to fall to the ground. The sound of sniper fire struck Blake's ears and she watched as Ruby skidded along the hull of the ship and in one grand slash beheaded a quartet of Beowolves.

To her left and down on the dirt planes Weiss was skating around on her Glyphs, bouncing in the air and striking through the thinning horde. Yang was a glowing mass of flames as half a dozen Beowolves crashed against her only to be lifted up and hurled away with a shockwave of her Aura.

The strongest Alpha let out a low howl as it kicked dirt out from under its paws in its struggle to flee. 'Calling for retreat,' Blake thought as she sent her coiling clawing Aura into Gambol Shroud and violet energy surged to the surface, thrashing like a fires shadow. 'I don't know how many you killed doing this but-' Blake felt the ships frame buckle and crunch beneath her jump, her Aura flickered and she shot herself forward, one clone, two clones, three, each one adding speed and power as she brought up her arms.

'It is over!' Blake's mind roared as the Beowolf sense her approach, one arm lashing out even as it tried to dodge.

But she was faster, soaring right over its blow, Blake slammed her cleaver against the Alpha's neck and after just a moments resistance she cut through its defences. The Alpha's head was flung from its body and an arcing beam of violet energy cut through the air as Blake fell into a side role. Slapping her palm against the ground, she felt a rumble run across her frame before flinging herself up and landing on her feet.

She was just in time to see Ruby kick the last Beowolf off the ship, sending it hurtling into the ground. The remainders of the horde, save a few, fled back into the woods with Weiss and Yang practically bellowing in triumph as they blitzed through the stragglers in an instant.

"It’s over," Blake sighed to herself as she looked over her friends, her chest feeling so light it was almost empty. Blake let out a heaving breath she didn't know she'd been holding as they all rushed to meet one another.

"We won!" Ruby cheered, flinging herself forward and before they could even think to resist she dragged both Weiss and Blake with her as she crashed into Yang's open arms who happily brought them into one of her crushing hugs.

"You're OK!" Yang exulted, her breathing was ragged and her eyes a wild red as she took them in again and again, muttering, "You're all OK."

"It was touch and go for a second," Blake thought, a sense of fear she hadn't been able to process in
the fight flashing through her mind and almost freezing in her gut.

"But we pulled through, marvellously I say, and we cleared out more than our fair share of Beowolves!" Weiss said, as they all pulled away from the hug and she regained her ability to speak.

"They must have been under that Alpha's control, along with some of the betas keeping an eye on the newborns. They could lure people in with an easy fight, retreat, and then sneak up on whoever attacked with the Alphas and greater numbers later," Blake said. "I've seen things like this before, I should have."

"Don't start that we won! It's OK and we were all awesome!" Ruby said, tugging at her arms.

"Besides we were acting on bad information," Weiss added, folding her arms as she glanced at the hollowed out engines.

Yang slammed her fists together, seething as smoke rose up from her body, the air around her wavering from the heat. "Those Shorelight people are going to have a lot of explaining to do, Grim is one thing but this place was stripped to the bone before we got here!"

"I think they got some of the bones too," Blake added, thinking of the hollow ringing in the ships interior.

"Could someone else have done it and they not know?" Ruby asked, a worried frown on her lips as she tried to look anywhere but her team.

Blake could see Yang's mounting frustration at the thought of the Shorelight residents not only sending them into a death-trap, but upsetting Ruby too? For Yang that was a step too far beyond the pale.

"Let's go back and investigate," Weiss said sharply, hands resting Ruby and Yang on the shoulders. "Nothing is worse than condemning from ignorance after all."

"I agree, it could be a mistake but... there are groups that do this kind of thing, so we should be careful, no matter what we do," Blake said.

Letting out a guttural snort Yang rolled her eyes and said, "Fine I'll be nice, but there had better be a da-dang good explanation for this."

"Yang, I know swears," Ruby said, an almost mischievous smile on her lips.

"Lalala, don't want to hear it!" Yang sang as she spun around and began marching towards Shorelight.

Ruby jumped up on her back, Crescent Rose already wavering about as she half hugged and half scouted on her sisterly perch.

Sending Weiss a look of mutual relief and amusement she and Blake took after the sisters and back to Shorelight for answers.

Chapter End Notes
Notes:
Welcome to the fourth instalment of 'Pirate Signals', as always thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases for beta reading (Not an easy job) and to all of you who have read, liked and commented!

So I had a lot of fun with Yang showing her engineering savvy this chapter and with some extra world building. I did a lot of reading on Atlas battleships, and ship terminology for this chapter, though in some respects still not nearly enough. I even used a screen cap of an Atlesian ship, added a picture of chibi Yang and had her and the rest of the team explaining how it worked, which was very fun, if requiring a lot of edits. (Once again, thanks Person With Many Aliases)

The Beowolves basically came in three varieties in this chapter, the regular moo ones we know, the 'Aphas' we are familiar with and the coyote one, which is meant to be similar to the one Ironwood faced. The idea of it being stealthy and throwing stuff came from the V4 trailer. Additionally what Blake was weirded out by was how hollow the ship sounded, suffice to say, large sections have been stripped for parts, but those that did it tried to cover their tracks and leave some left over. The Dust-Tubes Weiss mentioned are the same ones Juniors mooks used in V1, episode 1 when robbing From Dust Till Dawn.

Anyway I hope this was a fun read, and if you have any questions, comments or critique please don't be shy!
It took almost an hour to get back to Shorelight. Not strictly because it was a long run, even if they'd carried back salvage metal like Yang had wanted, they could have cleared the time quickly. Blake however, had insisted they stop a little ways out of town; seeking cover behind a particularly large knoll that blocked the dipping afternoon sun, they'd made it a point to rest, inspect their weapons, and go over their plan.

In the end, with both Yang and Ruby having pushed for it, the direct approach was perceived as best. Albeit, with Blake and Weiss hanging to the back of their four Huntress formation to pull their friends back in case of an attack.

"This place is as lively as ever," Blake muttered as they trudged through nearly empty streets.

The Faunus's ears flicked every few seconds, and Ruby could hear, and occasionally, see people ducking away from their line of sight. "They uh, seem a bit nervous," she said.

"They should be," Yang growled, as they approached the village head's house.

A small crowd had gathered outside the circular, hard wood building, and were muttering frantically to one another. All were in what appeared to be the normal clothing for Shorelight, ranging from some form of overalls or leather beaten pants and shirts, to more thickly layered robes and tunics.

Their chatter came to a stop when Ruby waved her arm up and said, "Hello!"

Eyes wide and postures rigid, the entire crowd of ten or so people took two steps back for each of her own steps forward.

"Heyo," Yang called lazily. "We just got back from the wreck, interesting place your boss sent us to."

The weathered door of the cabin swung open and the redheaded figure of - Ruby was very grateful when she heard Weiss say the man's name - Escuo came out.

"You're all back, that's-" he started.

A can rapped against his side and he jumped left with a small yelp, as the village head marched out with a scowl on her face. Aiming her gnarled walking aid at them like it was a pistol - and Ruby couldn't say that it wasn't - she spat, "Your dog savaged one of our people!"

Gasping, and feeling as utterly scandalised as Weiss looked, Ruby said, "He would never do something like that!"

"Indeed, such heinous behaviour is beneath Zwei!" Weiss added.

Both of them ignored Blake's little snort of derision, they'd all seen what the corgi could do to an
ornery Grimm after all.

Unperturbed, the Village Head continued, "We accept you into our village, give you aid and you let your beast just maul one of our people?"

"Is the person he attacked dead?" Yang asked, arms folded as she stared at the cane waggling beneath her nose with a look of contempt unfamiliar to Ruby.

"Thankfully, Ginger wasn't hurt too badly," Escuo cut in, his voice was shaky, his face pale as his eyes danced around.

"It was hardly just a scare, Escuo," the village head snapped, "you barely got out alive and Ginger will be nursing her shoulder for weeks! You Huntresses owe us-"

"Nothing," Yang said, several eyes turned to her big sister, and Ruby desperately hoped that Yang had a plan beyond 'loom'. Raising her hands up in a show of mock surrender, a smile on her lips, Yang continued, "At least until we check the recordings and confirm your accusations, this could be a con after all."

"A con!?" Escuo screeched.

"Cameras," The village head murmured, taking a single step back from Yang.

"Oh of course, it's become rather standard procedure for us to set up cameras for security purposes," Weiss added airily. "I said it wasn't necessary, but Blake just insisted."

"And I was right," Blake added, her words and tone gelling with Weiss's and bordering on snide. Yang took a single step forward, the village heads cane pressed against her chest and the old woman was pushed back just ever so slightly, while Yang cracked her neck from side to side as if limbering up for a fight.

"Guys there's no need for a fight, I'm sure it was all just a big misunderstanding!" Ruby said.

"We warned them that Zwei was a guard dog, and he's too well trained to attack someone over nothing," Yang said. "Now if it were just that, maybe, just maybe, I could chalk it up to an accident, a mis-communication maybe?"

"But," Blake slid into the conversation as seamlessly as she did into a fight. "It is rather odd that it would happen after we were sent to investigate a crashed ship that's already been stripped clean of its parts."

"And that's ignoring the mass of Beowolves. Oh, we were warned, but so many, and such strong ones?" Weiss said.

Ruby glanced at the worried faces of the townsfolk but still mumbled, "It does seem kind of shady, what was Ginger doing in the warehouse?"

"I'm sure we'll know if we check the recordings," Yang said, "Want us to go get it then compare notes? Cause as it stands, this village is looking more and more like a chop-shop, with us just being in the way of your next payday."
"That's not it!" a woman cried from inside the house. Barely a moment later Ginger lurched out of the door, her arm in a sling and teeth grit. She moved in front of the village head and was joined by Escuo.

"Well, what is it?" Ruby asked, she kept her tone soft and light as she could. Looking around at the deplorable state of the village she added, "Look, if you're in some kind of trouble we could help." she trailed off.

The look Escuo and Ginger sent her was wide eyed, before their gazes shot to one another, then over their shoulders to their leader and kin.

"Maybe we should-" Escuo muttered.

"Quiet, that will just get us-" the village head started.

"It can't get much worse than this!" Ginger snapped before turning to face them, black tail flicking sharply. Uninjured hand clenched so hard it paled she said, "I was going to try and repair the damage I could, but not for you... We didn't expect you to come back," she spat, head sinking low and her words tainted with disgust.

"But we didn't want to, no one here does, barely anyone knew what was going and its- I mean- we're just desperate!" Escuo cried.

"That doesn't justify anything," Blake growled.

"What," Weiss said, sighing as she clutched her head, "has made you so desperate?"

"The pirates!" Someone, a child, shouted from a nearby house before ducking down below the window.

Ruby blinked, not just from the boys shout but from how half the villages ducked down and looked ready to scurry while the rest just nodded numbly.

"Pirates?" she finally asked, standing on her toes and spying no ships in the ocean and glancing over her shoulder and finding empty skies.

"They came here a year ago," the village head bit out, shoving past Escuo and Ginger. "They were a mutinous crew of bastards and thieves. They mutinied on the Battleship we sent you to, but lost control of it in the fight and crashed," she said waving her cane towards the crash site.

"After that," Ginger said, "the survivors teamed up with some trouble makers from Mistral, scavengers and other low lives, together they've become a plague on dozens of villages."

As Ginger’s words were lost to a furious hissing, Escuo took over and said, "They stripped the ship before the Beowolves moved in. Then they knocked out our Support Towers and lured Grim to our towns with strafing runs. They attacked our scouts and guards, left us with our backs up to the walls!" Escuo said hurriedly, his eyes had a wild hunted look to them Ruby thought.

“Finally.” The village head said, heat and bile lost from her tone, and each word with a heavy, dusty sort of weight to it, “at our most vulnerable, they came to us with a deal.”

She sighed, her voice practically rattling in her throat. "Give them supplies from food to Dust every
"They even bullied some of the younger ones into joining, none of them had a choice and with that, we lost most of our warriors. We can barely hold on, let alone try and repair the Support Towers to contact Mistral for aid."

"So our ship?" Blake pried.

"Payment," Escuo muttered. "Towns that give extra tribute get lighter treatment for a time. The pirates know about the Beowolves and have us lead people there to get them... taken out," he said awkwardly.

"I guess your dog knew I shouldn't have been messing with the ship because he tackled me out the moment I got near it with my tools," Ginger said, tapping her shoulder and giving a bitter laugh. "They're always in the market for airships and weapons, even wrecks can have useful parts. We used their one way radio to signal that we'd have a Bullhead ready in a few days for them to pick up. If we gave your ship to them, it would have taken the pressure off Shorelight but... It was still..." She bowed low, "I am sorry, what we've done for them, what they've done to us, it's all wrong but, but-

Ruby shot forward and clapped her hands on Ginger's good shoulder and tried to give the woman an encouraging smile. "Hey, hey, it's OK, and now that we know we can help!"

"These pirates aren't mere soldiers turned brigands girl," the village head said ominously.

"Oh?" Yang queried, her anger faded, the blonde simply stood with her arms folded and a faintly creased brow.

"Some are I suppose," The village head amended, eyes looking off so the side. "Mere soldiers and scavengers, village kids who don't know any better or have no choice," she muttered. "But their leaders," a chill seemed to run through her frame, into the ground and through the villagers. "They are very dangerous men. One is a brutish warrior, equal to any Hunter, another is an assassin, who moves faster than even our warriors could follow, and their leader-"

A shudder ran through her frame and she clutched her chest, "I've seen horrific wars, fought in village feuds, and faced down Grimm... But their captain, I have never met such a creature, more than a soldier or a Hunter, he is beyond terrifying. So much so I could barely speak when he came to us!"

Glancing around Ruby found similarly haunted looks on the other village’s faces. Finally she said, "So, I guess you guys can't fight them, but what about us?"

"Were you not listening, girl!?" The elder shouted.

"Cool it," Yang said, one arm raised in-front of Ruby as though to shield her, as she glared down at the old leader.

"Carmen would tear a band of green girls like you apart in seconds," she snapped. "There's over a hundred of them now, all well-armed, well fed and ready to kill. These aren't Grimm, they're people with ships, guns and Aura; that makes them a thousand times more terrible!" She shouted.

"Well what about the Support Tower?" Weiss said, before Ruby could offer her very well thought out counter point of, 'we could totally take-em'.
"The support towers?" Escuo asked.

"I see," Blake said, "if we can't handle them, Mistral definitely could, so it's just a matter of getting into contact with them."

Smiling brilliantly Weiss said, "Exactly, and walking is out of the question, the great lake between there and here is like a small ocean, but an emergency call? That can be done."

"Were you not listening when I said they destroyed the tower?" The Village head asked in a wary 'You are clearly idiots’ tone.

"Were you not listening when I introduced myself?" Weiss asked coyly.

Leaning back towards Weiss, Yang mock whispered, "Technically, I don't think you ever did introduce yourself."

Twitching for a moment, a luminescent blush spread across Weiss's cheeks. "Oh, of course, silly me," she said, before placing a single hand on her chest. "I am Weiss Schnee, my family built those towers and I know they aren't so easily rendered useless."

"I have to agree with Weiss," Blake said, as she rubbed her chin in thought. "If they want to keep an operation running like this they would need some long distance communications. Plus you already mentioned a way to contact them; even if the towers not working properly, chances are they still had to keep it operating in some form, taking them out would cause too many problems."

"Exactly," Weiss said. "I mean, even if they harvested radio equipment from the ship, it was too burnt out to compensate for a tower. Besides," she said, folding her arms, "the local branches of the SDC and Council would know if a tower went down and send someone to fix it. It's far more likely that they set up some sort of blocking equipment, just damaged, or maybe co-opted it enough to undermine the average Scrolls ability to communicate but not military level equipment. If we can inspect the damage, or even activate the distress signal, Mistral can almost certainly be contacted."

Escuo and Ginger glanced at one another and finally the redhead said, "We did try improving the signal radio they gave us to make a distress call, only it was still too basic for any improvements to do what we needed. But," he murmured, "The Support Towers another story."

"Great, so we go, fix the support tower, call in Mistral, and boom problem solved?" Yang said, clapping her hands.

"You'd be willing to do take that kind of risk?" Escuo asked, tired eyes looking watery as he stared at them.

"Of course, it's the right thing to do," Ruby answered for her team. "Though her enthusiasm dulled for a moment when she turned to her friends and asked, "Do we know how to repair a CCT Support Tower?"

The sudden wave of eyes not meeting hers and mumbles responses was not encouraging.

Scratching her neck, Yang said, "I do engines, I can mess with that kind of stuff a bit, but I'm not an expert on quantum entanglement."
"Me too," Blake said, "I've worked with radios a lot in the past, but depending on how much they did, it may be beyond my skills."

"Then first things first is we find someone who we can be assured can fix it," Weiss said.

"I volunteer!" Escuo said, raising his hand as he stepped forward, tattered jacket swaying with him as he moved closer to their group. Perhaps seeing their arched brows of surprise he elaborated. "Ginger and I do most of the technical work around here, she's better with engines, but me, I know Scrolls and the CCT. If nothing else, I've fixed them when they were damaged before so I'm the best around at the moment."

"Escuo don't be a fool, even if you make it, what if they find out?" The village head said.

"Then tell them I snuck off in the night and you had no idea what I was doing," he said numbly.

"This is no way to live elder," Ginger added, her tail hanging low as she spoke. "We won't survive forever like this and the pirates know that. Eventually they'll move on and we'll die, one way or another."

Never good at reading moods Ruby couldn't entirely tell if it was hope spreading through the town. But the murmurs of the villagers sounded less dread filled as they spoke amongst themselves, eyes never straying too far from Ruby and her team.

"Escuo," The village head started only for Ginger to step up.

"Me too, I'm not as good with electronics, but I can help," she said, flexing her injured hand.

Looking to the dirt the elder muttered, "If you two leave us I cannot guarantee your safe return, not from the Grim, or the pirates."

It said a great deal to Ruby that the woman spoke of these pirates with the same dread she did the Grim.

"There were never any assurances with pirates or Grim, but this way we can hedge out bets for things going back to normal," Escuo said.

Sighing the village head nodded and said, "Very well, I wish you luck and good speed, but understand we must care for the whole here. Provided you are discovered," she looked down, "there is nothing we can do, for any of you."

An uncomfortable silence hung in the air, until Yang clapped both Ginger and Escuo softly on the backs and said, "Well we got ourselves a plan! We'll go restock and meet outside Shorelight in say, twenty? Hope you guys can run or don't mind being carried."

"Actually," Ginger said, "I may have something for that, something else I was saving for the pirates."

A few minutes later they were inside a old metal shed behind Escuo’s store, and Yang was giddily staring down at the clunky, but done up, cross-country hover-bike, that in many respects looked more like an Atlas Snowmobile.

"Oh baby, yeah!" she said, "You two can definitely keep up with us on this, well, provided Ruby
doesn't go unfairly fast that is. Hey, once we're done, you guys mind helping us salvage the battleship for scraps? This baby would make transporting stuff way easier, ooh is that a custom booster?” she said, trailing off as she inspected the green and grey bike.

"I just hope this works, it will pay off a little of our," she looked at the bike and grimaced, “a little of our debt, and means we won't be hurting Shorelight's chances by taking it."

"Then we'll just have to make sure this works, right?" Ruby said.

Chapter End Notes

As always thank you to 'Persons With Many Aliases,' for beta reading, and to everyone who has liked, favourited and reviewed, its great to get so much wonderful feedback!

I hope this reveal isn't a disappointment in regards to the overall mystery of the town and the nature of the pirates. Also for reference the title of this arc comes from all the various 'signals' that there are pirates nearby, or at least that something is very wrong, Shorleight being so rundown, things like Griffons popping up, the crashed Atlesian vessel, you get the idea.

The next chapter will actually be a flashback to help establish the pirates and lead us into the second, main segment of this arc. It will also pull double duty, allowing for a brief time-skip, and a hopefully smooth change in perspectives as our deuteragonists are introduced!

Thanks you for reading!
Reed marched down the brightly lit silver and aqua-lined halls of Atlas's newly refurbished 'Aqua Two'. Armoured Atlesian soldiers whose colour scheme -barring the black part of the body suits- matched the ships interior marched through the metal halls with their usual firm discipline. He eyed them all with a grim expression, internally pleased their uniform's metal visor hid his obvious interest in each of the passing soldier, as he worked to make out their chatter.

"Man I've been waiting forever for these freaking upgrades, I mean I actually have a holo-computer now and everything's so much swisher!" One of the soldiers said as they neared him. The man was gesticulating wildly with his hands, seemingly pointing at every area of the newly refurbished hallway.

"I know, and I knew the last seventy times you told me," Groused the other, a woman. Seeing his approach she sent Reed a nod and a snappy salute that was followed by her partner along with a quiet, "Sir," as he passed.

Acknowledging them with a nod, Reed strode passed the duo and made a sharp right turn into a hallway marked ‘officers’ quarters’, where each of the doors had nearly double the space of the regular regulars' quarters.

The bulky officer swung right and stomped towards his own room, near the right end of the hallway. He lazily wafted his metal gloved hand over glowing aqua scanner that 'pinged!' and said, 'Welcome back to your quarters, Officer Reed' in a melodic but obviously computerised voice.

Marching into his sparse medium sized quarters, Reed went over the room with his usual critical gaze. Like the rest of the ship it was mostly steel with aqua lining, the Atlas and SDC insignia was emblazoned all over the room. Unlike the rank and file soldiers who only had a single bed each, attached to the wall with a small section of space for personal effects, a basin and their computers, Reed's room was more spacious, though hardly charming.

There was a small open area right at the back he used for exercise, weights and a mat all sat neatly in one corner. Off to his right was the much wider and more spacious desk that included both a large holo-screen TV and computer, allowing both flat screen viewing and three dimensional projections. Conveniently, it also housed a localised connection to the main server so he could command from his room-office if needed. There was also a few thin cables running from an open panel on the floor to under his bed that were very much not ‘standard issue’.

Finally, to his left was a shelf half filled with books and other miscellanea and then there was his large, white and very occupied, bed. "Mmm," Reed let out a low rumble at the sight of the man on his bed, one leg folder over the other, the thin white haired man had headphones on his ears and was humming along to some poppy tune. He wore the black body suit common to the rest of the crew, but he was no soldier.

Freezing for an instant the thin and sharp faced man's eyes opened and he glanced at Reed. Then in a writhing blur of black and silver he was gone, only for Reed to feel the smaller man leaning against his armoured back, humming cheerfully.
"Hello Reaver, long day at the office?" He said in a speedy high pitched voice that sounded like he was vibrating as he spoke.

Snorting Reav- Reed, swatted behind his back trying to grasp him only for his target to blur into existence in front of him. "Nn," He grunted, "Don't call me that, and work on being quieter, Blur." Reed ignored the speed demon chuckling, his warped laughter’s as each vocalisation sounded like three laughs were slipping out for every one movement.

"But it suits you so well my ruffian! Now, now, have you come to check up on me? Is work over? Maybe it’s time to start?" He asked excitedly. Before Reed could speak Blur continued, shooting around the room, yanking books of shelves and flicking through them at an absurd speed before tossing them aside and letting his hands stray across the holographic computer. "Not that your quarters aren’t charming but being cooped up so long makes me get a little tense, wild, energetic!" he said before flickering out of view and reappearing over to the bed, laying on his side Blur gestured down his own frame, letting out a gasp as he said, "Want to help me work some off some steam? Who knows, it may bring a smile to that face of yours."

"I have more work to do, I'm just making sure you're staying in place. We don't need any trouble on your end, smuggling you aboard was difficult enough," Reed answered in his usual timber.

Blur groaned, rolling onto his side, back and forth, back and forth as his body seemed to quiver and distort. "All this waiting, just for a silly ship, when do we start?"

Ignoring his fellow conspirator dramas Reed turned around and began working on his console. "You'll know when it’s time," Reed finally said as Blur’s whining failed to die down. Fingers flying over the holographic keys, he erased another log of audio files and sent a pre-made message to his agents in the com-room, 'Almost time, our fake signals to Atlas is holding strong and the faux transmissions have worked since we went dark, but I can't let him jump the gun.'

'Dammit, this is too soon, Carmen,' Reed thought to himself, mind awhirl with everything that could still go wrong. What if Atlas acted too fast, or were suspicious and sent scouts well passed the place they’d broken their signal in the ocean and spied the battleship flying well, or simply detected them by the CCT and broke through? 'Too much can go wrong, even with all the ridiculous fanfare going on back home,' he thought.

For his part Blur seemed to laugh again, and then he zoomed to Reed’s side and leaned against the console. He patted the much larger man's muscled shoulder and said, "You crack me up. You always try and act so professional, but really," He whispered breathlessly, leaning in next to Reed’s neck, "You're just as dramatic as the rest of us Reaver, and I want to see you let it out. I mean we're all friends in this little conspiracy aren't we?"

Sighing Reed pushed off from the desk and strode to the door, just as he opened his mouth to speak the aqua lights flashed red and a screeching alarm rang out through the ship.

'Warning! Warning!' Cried the computerised voice now in a harsher, firmer tone. 'Mutiny in progress, all personnel reinforce the Command Centre!'

"It’s time," Reaver said coldly, grasping a domed metal weapon by its handle. From the handle a single flat looking strip of metal surrounded his fist on all sides and rising up on four points from the circle with blades that all fused together at the top. Suffice to say his favoured weapon resembled a giant bloodied whisk.
Reed's door shot open with a hiss, and footsteps hit the mutineer’s ears, just as a fellow officer entered his vision, Reaver shot his arm out in front of the solider, sending him to the ground with a jerky thud.

"Reed!" Calen said, reaching for his side arm.

Reaver's weapon spun to life with a high pitched buzz, more akin to a snarling Grimm than a machine, he drove his fist into the shocked man's throat before he could even scream.

Wiping the blood form his visor Reaver glanced over his shoulder to see Blur watching him with raised eyebrows and a pleased smile.

Growling he shouted, "Blur, move!"

Smirking he fell into a runners pose and said, "Gone bae," And like that Blur vanished from sight.

Blur smirked as wing-shaped blades sprung up from his gloved wrists and his boots' ankles. He danced and weaved his way around the charging soldiers who were wearing the same uniform as him and so naturally did not know what to expect until he'd drawn the blade across their throat.

"Reaver's such a drama queen," Blur murmured as he swiped a stolen key card across a terminal. The key pad clicking and clacking at absurd speeds as he types in the codes only stopping to wave at some soldiers bellowing at him.

"Bye bye!" He waved as the blast doors slammed shut all over the ship and the sounds of gun-fire exploded from the other side as their mutinous allies let loose.

"Freeze!" A soldier shouted, even as he pulled the trigger on his rifle which let out an electronic 'phew!'

'Well, I guess it's time for me to have some fun too,' Blur decided, and in an instant he leaned out of the way of the soldiers shot and appeared behind him with the man's pistol pointed at the back of his armoured head.

He pulled the trigger in rapid succession tearing away the man's helmet with the blast and sending him to the floor with a thud. As he sang, "Too slow, too bad, so sad!"

Then the soldiers foot shot out and swept Blur from his feet, 'What!?' Blur thought, as a stinging pain ran across his Aura before fading. He barely managed to slam his hands onto the floor and springboard himself out of the way of the rifle-fire. 'More soldiers coming, time to go!'

Blur weaved his way around the smarmy soldiers and ducked around the corner. He heard them racing after him only to get caught the gun-battle taking place not two hallways down, it didn't sound like it was going 'well' for either side. 'Oh well, less people bigger cuts,' He thought with a shrug, leaning out of the way of another energy bolt.

"Damn you!" Another random soldier shouted in his guttural voice, or maybe it was the same one he’d shot, Blur really couldn't tell. The armoured man dived out from behind his cover, took aim and then staggered forward as something smashed into his back. He looked over his shoulder and saw a tiny mine stuck to his back and connected to his attacker by a wire. In a numb voice he said,
"Grenadier?"

"Buh-bye!" Blur said, waving at the soldier as his back-up sent a pulse of Aura through the wire and the highly concentrated explosion tore through their enemy with a red flash! 'Gross,' Blur thought at the splatter on the walls.

"Should we help the others sir?" The Grenadier asked, jogging up to his side and brushing back his spiky tufts of blonde hair.

Blur just shrugged and glanced down the hallways, "If you like, I'll watch your back," He offered with a grin as he fiddled with his wrist-blades.

Vice-captain, well, former vice-captain Carmen grinned as Reed radioed in through his earpiece with a simple, "The troop quarters are secured, minor superficial damage." Blur piped in a second later with a speedier and more excited, "Almost done here, a few things broke, but it'll be fine!"

The brunette chewed on a toothpick as he tightly clutched the two massive guns in his hands. In his right was a long and thick anti-material sniper rifle that was, frankly closer to a cannon in design. In his left was a similarly massive gun but this one was a long range mini-gun instead, less smooth than its counterpart, all sharp edges and gnarled barrels.

Around him the console room was littered with the dead, only a few of his soldiers had made it through but those that had were now in control of the ship. In front of him kneeled a blonde woman with a short ponytail, wearing the white Officers military uniform with aqua shoulder pads. A small trickle of blood ran out of her mouth and she stared up at him with hatred in her brown eyes.

Carmen just smiled, he'd been waiting on this for ages! "It's a shame you're as tough as you are, otherwise I might have kept you, but oh well," he sighed, shrugging as he tightened his hold on the trigger, "it's been fun, my captain." Flicking his short ponytail over his shoulder Carmen began to squeeze the trig- 'What's she doing!?'

Carmen pulled the triggers but the captain had already slammed her black night stick into the main computer, lightning rippling around the controls, as his bullets tore through her and- right into the consoles-, 'She turned off what Aura she had left!'

Metal clanked as it was torn apart and shattered from his blast, lightning shot off from the main computers and flying across the command centre, tearing the ship to shreds.

His troops cried, "Sir we've lost control of the ship, the gravity controls are fluctuating!"

"That bitch!" He snarled.

"What's going on?" Reaver cut in.

"Brace for impact!" And like that the Aqua Two began diving down towards the coast of Mistral.

'Shit, shit SHIT!'

"Urk-haa!" were the soldier's dying 'words' as Carmen’s hands closed around her throat until he heard a snap and she went limp. Flinging the soldiers his perch on the torn up command centres
main terminal she hit the torn up metal floor with a clank

Carmen’s eyes lazily trailed over the formally spotless command centre of the Aqua Two that was now marked by charred and melted metal from the lightning, gunshot damage and torn up computing equipment. Only half the monitors were still working and, oh, of course the ship had been torn in half! The hull and more than half of the supply and troop’s quarters were some twenty feet away, dug into the dirt and on fire. Meanwhile the engines engines and wings were all over the crater they’d made upon impact and the command centre was in two halves with the majority of it rendered useless as a whole.

To say the ship's value had dropped would be an understatement. ‘Fuck,’ Carmen thought to himself, 'I said I was bringing the latest and greatest Atlas had to offer; those fat-cat Mistrali backstabbers are never going to pay top dollar for this wreck.'

On his right and left stood two heavily armoured soldiers wielding a mini-gun and a flamethrower respectively, while no Specialists, they were a cut above regular soldiers and made for intimidating guards. Down below Reaver was standing watch over the now dead soldiers who'd been muttering about mutiny, failure and ‘justice’ before Carmen had started turning the louder amongst them into impromptu stress balls. Blur wa-

The speedsters hand slapped Carmen on the back as the assassin cheerfully said, "Well at least you're in a better mood now, and I have some more good news for you!"

"What? Have the Beowolves stopped being a pain in the ass?" Carmen grunted, taking a swig of his Mistrali whisky, he'd really been looking forward to getting that refilled as well.

"Grenadier and what's left of your crew seem to have driven the last of them off, but I'm talking about something the scanners picked up!" Blur said.

"When did you-" Carmen stopped himself as Blur shot off around the deck again and popped up next to one of the only still living, and loyal, soldiers at one of the few living terminals.

Tapping the holographic screen Blur said, "I'm quick, try to keep up." His bodies vibrations faded and his next words were said in a more normal, sedate pace, “We have incoming and the scanners say it’s a Bullhead and a pretty rickety one at that if its chugging is anything to go by!"

"Rickety you say..." Carmen mused, twisting a new toothpick in his mouth and grinning.

"They aren't calling out to survivors?" Reaver asked.

Blur shook his head frantically, his face becoming a blur of white as he said, "Nope, nope, nope! From what we can tell these are the scavengers you brought in to hide the ship till we made the sale," at that Blur snorted as he glanced around the ruined ship. "I guess they figured there might be something to salvage," Blur shrugged.

"How soon?" Reaver cut in.

"Oh, in about a minute?" Blur said cheerfully.

"You should have reported this upon first noticing an irregularity," Ground the muscle-head.

"Relax Reaver, this is good, we can work with this. Blur," Carmen said, and he was pleased to see
the man snap to attention from the Scroll-game he'd been playing. "Once they're in range, jump aboard and acquire that Bullhead for me."

"Do you want the crew alive or dead?" Blur asked, flicking out his winged-blades.

"Alive, for now anyway, we'll see what they have to offer us and then decide if they're worth keeping around, go."

With his orders received Blur shot out of the cockpit leaving blurred after images behind him and forcing more than a few of the soldiers to lean out of his path, though for his part Carmen and Reaver simply rolled their eyes at the man’s showiness.

"Reaver, once we have the Bullhead begin stripping this ship apart. I want anything useful you can get, if we can't sell it as planned, we can at least use the sum of its part no?" Carmen said.

"So we won't be trying to return to Atlas sir?" Reaver asked, the little crease in the shaggy haired man’s brow telling Carmen all he needed to know of his old friend's mood.

"Psh! No, I had no plans to come back from this, I'm fairly sure the rest of us did something questionable or left something behind before we left, didn't we?" Carmen asked sarcastically.

He received a smattering of awkward confirmations from his crew and Carmen knew he'd left more than enough of a paper trail that there was no way he'd be able to play this crash off as anyone else's fault if people started asking questions. Well, if Atlas asked anyway. Thankfully, Reaver and the others understood that no plan survived contact with the enemy, and the mutineers who saw him fall for their former captain's payday ruining trick were all dead, so he was fine there. 'Still, no going back to Atlas, we'll have to cut it out here by ourselves.'

"If you didn't take the opportunity to settle a few grudges, Reaver, then I'm sorry, but there won't be any going back," Carmen said.

"I didn't want to endanger the mission sir," Reaver said, standing at attention.

"So admirable," Carmen retorted with a sigh.

"Sir, the Bullhead has landed!"

"Begin the operation, I'm going to see what we have to work with," Carmen said with a sigh, strolling out of the damaged cockpit and into the burnt out hallways behind him as Reaver began giving out orders.

'There was meant to be a town near here wasn't there? He wondered. 'Maybe they wouldn't mind making a little donation to soldiers down on their luck?' He thought with a chuckle.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again, I hope this chapter was an interesting read; as an aside, this flashback chapter to the battleships crash, was initially going to be the prologue however I was convinced to keep an air of mystery regarding how the villains of this arc would
manifest and I am very glad they suggested it (Plus that led to the Beach chapter which was fluffy fun) As always thanks go out to my beta Person With Many Aliases and all of you who have read, liked, commented on and corrected my when necessary, thanks for everything!

Also meet our main villains for this arc, Carmen, Reaver and Blur. For anyone curious, Carmen and Reed/Reaver grew up in relatively rough neighbourhoods and stick together by and large due to shared background and history. Reaver is a nickname/code name that Reed is not terribly fond of but utilises for intimidation value in certain circles; I had his perspective switch between the two to try and show his mental image of himself, when he's the "Proper soldier" he's Reed, when he's a criminal, he's "Reaver". Blur was a criminal they hired to help with their plans. I based Blur's personality on Hermes from Disney's Hercules which is partially where the 'bae' comes from.
The art of meditation was nearly as old as the very concepts of contemplation and battle alike. To master one's mind, body and spirit, to the point of making the conscious and unconscious mind malleable was no easy task. It was, many said, innate to discovering one's Aura and Semblance, to reach not within one's self but through one's self in order to touch the very soul and transcend natural limitations.

'To master meditation, is to master one's self, and through that, reach new heights,' or so her old master had often said.

Not one to simply accept a difficult task, Arslan Altan liked to make anything she engaged in a challenge. Hence, using a single index finger on her bandaged-wrapped right hand, pressed against the rumbling metal floor to hold her body aloft like a needle, while she was trying to meditate.

The key word to Arslan, though, was 'trying'

The mighty thrum of the Bullhead vibrating all around her was nothing. The roar of the engines and the flickering beeps of machinery, little more than wind to her senses. Such immaterial things could be ignored, absorbed, and mastered. A much more difficult thing to take were auras of boredom and irritation, radiating in three stark lights, so familiar but still so foreign.

"Bored," A masculine voice said, followed by the thump of boot against wall.

'The noise isn't helping anyone, let alone my focus,' She thought, a tiny shudder of vexation running through her spine and across every nerve. Another thump followed by a squeak and a grunt met her ears like clockwork. Her arms and legs moved seamlessly, flowing through the air, folding and unfolding, twisting and turning in harmony with her body. Yet each 'thump', every two seconds, broke the focus of her mind like a lightning bolt through the air.

Spinning on her fingertip Arslan bent her elbow down as she felt the ships angle just ever so slightly upwards. Gravity pressed against her back as she hooked her legs around one another, bandaged ankles and thick black pants brushed together as she crossed her legs.

"I'm boooored!" he droned again.

With a swift flexing of her muscles, the Aura flowing through them wound tight, Arslan flicked herself up and slipped her legs back under herself. Falling into a cross legged sitting positions, Arslan cracked her neck from side to side, before picking her yellow, white and red lined robe up from the floor and sliding it over her shoulders and black training top.

Opening her eyes, the platinum blonde Huntress arched an eyebrow at the source of the racket.

Golden eyes, on a sharp, lightly tanned, face looked up towards her; the boy's long and nearly wild dark hair pooled on the grey floor. His thick yellow sash, open blue training vest, dark beads wrapped around his arms and yellow laced, grey pants, gave the impression of a monk. The fact his heavy black boots were pressed up and thumping against the wall however, showed he at least lacked a monk’s patience.

"Bolin," Arslan said, hiding her weary sigh, at what was currently his second prolonged
interruption of her meditation. "If you keep that up," she said gesturing at his feet, "you are liable to irritate our pilot."

"Thank you!" Their pilot called from the cockpit.

Rolling his eyes and flinging himself to his feet, Bolin’s stature let him practically towered over her. Pouting he said, "Well it’s not my fault it’s so dull in this box. I mean, come on, we've been stuck in here for like an hour and the net dropped out ages ago." He made to lean back against the side door only for Arslan to shoot to her feet, hand whipping out she guided him to the wall.

"If it opens you'll fall into Grimm territory," she said.

"Oh don't be such a worrywart," was his answer, however the stern glare she sent him left her partner ceding to her guidance.

Spinning around, Arslan reached up to the thick metal handles that were welded to the roof and un-clipped two red beaded, necklaces from them, one small and close to her neck and the other long enough to hang near her chest.

Evidently bored again, Bolin groaned and thumped his head against the wall, Arslan was beginning to think she'd develop an involuntary twitch if that kept up.

"Why did we even take this stupid mission? I mean, what's fun about 'inspect the CCT Support Tower and report back'?" He paraphrased, complete with finger quotes and a faux deep voice that sounded vaguely insulting.

"A diverse mission portfolio is the key to a successful career as a Huntsmen, Bolin," Arslan answered as she slipped her necklaces over her head. "Besides," Arslan said, "this is an important mission. If the rumour mill is correct, its has taken Mistral far too long to to send anyone."

"Great," Bolin said with a roll of his eyes, "while we're kicking around here in the swamps, SSSN and CNEM get to hang back at Haven and chill for the holidays."

Tying her embroidered red sash with a sharp white Endless Knot symbol on the front, around her waist, Arslan waved for Bolin to follow her into the cockpit, "If you are that bored and won't entertain meditation-"

"Dozing," he snickered, accepting a high five from a black gloved hand waving out the cockpit entrance.

"Then try creating some entertainment," Arslan finished as she stepped into the crowded cockpit. Glancing around and taking in the monitors, their loosely armoured pilot, the tree line below and most importantly her teammates Arslan said, "You two are keeping out of trouble I hope."

"There's no trouble to make," Nadir said from where he sat, spinning in the co-pilots seat. His chest was pressed to the back of the chair, his arms folder over it, and his thick white jacket crinkling from his owner’s poor treatment of it.

"Sit up straight," Arslan automatically chided upon seeing the boys obvious slouch.

"Hah, you got told," cried a keening little voice from the floor. Arslan glanced down at Reese Chloris, the two black lines on her cheeks standing out starkly against her soft features. The girl had dropped her purple hoodie, revealing her mass of spiky green hair, combed over to one side and showing the shaved hair on the left side of her head. Her black gloved hands toyed with several small, pointed tools as she prodded at the Scroll sitting on her black padded knees.
"Reese," Arslan said very slowly, "I hope that's your Scroll you're playing with."

"This time it is," Reese said, snickering as Bolin and Nadir patted their pockets in paranoid worry. "I'm trying to tune in to whatever is messing with the frequencies but this guy," she said pointing at their pilot, "won't let me near the radio."

"Have you had any luck?" Arslan asked.

"Nope," Reese said, tapping at one of her Scrolls’ green computer chips, "I tried rerouting the power to boost the signal but that didn't exactly... work."

"It started vibrating and almost hit her in the head," Nadir cut in.

"Shut up, what happened to loyalty to your partner Nadir!?" Reese huffed.

"Hah, I wish I'd seen that!" Bolin said.

They quieted down as Arslan raised her hands and said, "Don't be pests, Reese is at least trying to do something."

Arslan ignored Reese sticking her tongue out at the two boys as she glanced out the window to see the swamp lands below passing by very... slowly. Coming to the pilots’ side, she place a hand on the back of his chair and asked, "Are we approaching the landing sight?"

She tuned out the hushed "She just asked are we there yet!" spectacle her team were engaging in behind her and focused on pale blonde before her.

Shaking his head the pilot said, "Still a ways off yet."

"Then how come we're going so slow, Crim?" Asked Bolin.

"I take it with the tower down you want to be careful?" Arslan guessed.

"Right you are there ma'am," the pilot, Crim, nodded. "If another ship's gonna take off right beneath us or drop down, I don't want to risk crashing into them. Plus," he shrugged, "with the radios out it’s just safer."

"I bet I could get the radio working," Reese practically sing songed.

Harrumphing their pilot started to speak, "I bet you'd j-"

"Up ahead, at two," Arslan said briskly.

All eyes turned towards the window pane, even Reese reassembled her Scroll and squeezed in between her leader and Nadir. "What's an Atlas Specialist Ship doing here?" Reese murmured at the sharp angled, almost dart like ship, sliding from the tree line as it began to climb into the air.

Crim flicked a switch and a sudden beep rang out, "I'm hailing but they're not responding, even with the radio gone they should be able to hear me this close."

Arslan squinted as she stared at the back of the ship, forcing herself lower to follow its path through the glass covered screens and she saw a faint green glow radiating from three black prongs. Eyes widening she said, "Left!"

Well trained, Crim yanked the lever left and the Bullhead swooshed as they angled just out of range of a green laser blast that tore into the trees below.
"Why are they shooting at us!?” Nadir screamed.

"Atlas dicks!" Reese balked.

"Taking evasive manoeuvres," Crim grunted as he scanned the screens and gasped. "They're coming in for a dive!"

Slapping Bolin's arm, Arslan said, "Lighten the ship," before dashing into the deck, wrenching open a locker and grasping the black steel cables within.

Behind her, Bolin slammed his palms against the floor and sent a flickering wave of orange Aura through the ship and there was a sudden jolt as they shot forward. Arslan could hear the Specialist Ship engine whizz by them only to pull out of its dive.

Grabbing four cables by their hooked ends, she tossed them at Reese who hugged them to herself and stared at her. "Bind everyone so no one falls out, and keep an eye out for Grimm!"

Reese hastened to obey, clipping her own binding to her ringed belt before turning to everyone else.

Still clinging to his seat Nadir shouted, "What about you?!

"I'm going to shoot them down," Arslan said. Hearing the last clasp click shut, Arslan slammed her palm against the doors controls. The Bullheads twin doors flung themselves open, a roaring gale felt like it’d suck her out as the winds howling tore into her ears.

Not wasting a moment, Arslan leapt out, the rushing winds smashing against her body like a wave. Unperturbed she grasped the base of the up-swinging door and flipped herself onto the roof. Hair whipping around her head like a golden mane, Arslan fell into a wide stance and stared down the Atlesian Ship as it flipped over and fell in behind them.

The scent of smoke and a crackling, sizzling sound was drowned out by the winds as she kindled a flame in her hands. A sharp growl slipped from her lips as she punched forward unleashing a fireball upon their pursuers sending them into a barrel role to avoid it.

'A good pilot,' Arslan thought as she drew back her arms and readied her second blast.

"Oh of course that's what she's going to do!” Nadir screeched as the wind almost tore his ponytail loose.

Bolin was still pressed against the floor, his copper aura flicking at his fingertips while his staff was held in place by one of his knees to keep it from flying out like half their travel packs did.

"Boy, can you keep that up!?” Crim bellowed.

"Not forever, just say when you need it done and we'll get heavier or lighter, got it?" Bolin answered.

"Got it, and you two-"

A loud thud echoed from the roof, and Arslan's rough timber hit their ears through the radio, "Reese, Nadir, keep the Nevermores off our backs!"

And just like that a dozen shrieks rang up from the woods below.
Reese barely hesitated, pulling her massive twin black and translucent-green bladed revolvers from her belt and slid out of the cockpit to open fire from the right open door.

Gulping, Nadir pulled his blade-topped assault rifle from his jacket and jumped from his seat. Catching himself on the side panel, he was nearly deafened by the howling winds even as he brandished his rifle and let loose a wave of bullets upon the flock of Nevermores pursuing them.

As a particularly large one tried to hurl itself into the jets, only to be sent squawking away by gunfire, Nadir thought, 'I knew this mission would suck.'

Arslan snarled, her veins felt stretched and rubbed raw as they burned against her skin. A small mass of Nevmores were swarming the ship, no giants thankfully, but many at least as big as a person.

Throwing her arm back she cracked open the skull of one of the sneakier ones. A pulse of Aura burst from her hands followed by a flame and she hurled the burning orb at her attackers even as her own ship ducked and weaved to try and avoid them.

Her fireball was on mark for the pilot, Arslan could just make out their silver hair. But in an instant his form blurred and their ship barrel rolled out of the way and let loose another blast.

"On mark!" Arslan thought. Her left open palm slapped across the back of her right hand. A radiant golden field solidified, just as the blast stuck. She sent the burning bolt hurtling into a nearby Nevermore that let out a strangled squawk as it was roasted from the inside.

She didn't give them a second to react. Thrusting both arms forward, a fwoosh hit the air and a condensed fireball shot towards the ship. Even the pirate’s prodigious skill wasn't enough to dodge it fully. Their ship angled right, and her shot missed one of the main engines, but her blast tore right the top layer of armour before flying past them.

Swinging its thrusters back and Arslan almost wanted to spit as their cowardly pursuers broke off and hurtled into the sky. Several weaker laser blasts were unleashed but Arslan barely had to deflect half of them given the Bullheads armour. 'Why would they-', Arslan sucked in a breath, spine tingling as it sought out something long since gone as her body tensed.

"Below!" she roared. Skidding along the top of the ship towards the wings but- ‘Damn!’ she picked the wrong side. Reese let out a shout and a sharp crackle rang out as ice encompassed the right jet engine. Her eyes shot to Nadir’s side as another ice-bolt froze his own jet and the Bullheads alarms blared.

The Nevermores tried to pursue them as the engines sputtered and tried to blast through the ice only to spark and smoke.

Arslan shot her head up and saw the Specialist Ship unleash another charged energy bolt towards them. It ripped through the air and Arslan barely thrust out her palms to meet the stinging hot beam. It crashed against the tightly bound Aura on her hands first, but Arslan's arms swelled up for an instant a thick dome of Aura burst from her hands and scattered the last blast in every direction save the ships like a firework. Pushing off from the roof, she flipped down into the deck, dragging Nadir and then Reese with her as the ground approached.

"Brace for impact," she barked, only for the radars to flare as something crashed against the base of the ship with a screech, causing the windows to explode inwards.
Arlsan threw herself in front of her team and tried to conjure up an Aura field to protect everyone on board, but they were moving too fast and some of the glass flew past her.

Crim let out a gurgled cry, a massive shard was jutting out of the side of his chest. A Nevermore let out a mighty shriek as it tore into the sky to watch them fall. The trees were approaching, the ground growing closer, 'Reese, Nadir, Bolin!'

"Drop low and guard Crim!" Arslan ordered, Bolin was still trying to lighten their load but the boy was panting, sweat dripping from his brow.

"One more Bolin," Arslan threw over her shoulder. She heard a grunt of confirmation and so Arslan dug her feet into floor, a pulse of Aura toughened the metal. Two thin jets of fire burst from her hands as she threw her hands back and Arslan launched herself from the cockpit. Bursting through the window she slammed into the ground ahead of them. The earth and tall grass was blasted aside by her landing and catching fire.

Spinning around to face the ship, she grit her teeth, and readied for impact.

'This might hurt.'

Nadir couldn't follow what happened next. All he knew was Arslan jumped out of Bullhead on streams of fire and a second or two later they came to a lurching halt that left his head colliding with the console as the Bullhead groaned like a dying Grimm.

Before he could even thank whatever force created Aura, Arslan grabbed him by the scuff of his shirt, and Nadir was pulled out of the ship's broken window, with Reese following after. Ears still ringing from the crash, he barely heard their orders to retreat.

He watched as Arslan jumped into the ship, hoisting Crim and a weary Bolin under her arms before leaping back out.

Reese was firing at something and when a Nevermore blurred into his sight Nadir opened fire with a shout, even as he staggered backward.

"Move and fire, into the trees!" Arslan said.

Nadir ran, he and Reese at Arslan's side, his partner firing back into the air as they sprinted into the waters and under the cover of the nearby trees.

The sharp roar of their attackers airships hit his ears, as their shadows passed overhead, and they ran deeper into the dingy green swamp.

The humidity of the swamp was oppressive to Bolin's very being. He truly regretted how thick his clothes were right now, open vest or no. The sounds of croaking frogs, buzzing insects, and the occasional fish splashing about were everywhere.

The entire place had an almost alien green tinge to it that Bolin couldn't say he liked. 'Swamp gas, it must be swamp gas,' he thought to himself at light reflecting off the water, the hazy air and thin not-quite-mist that hung around the low hanging tree branches.

Something cracked up ahead and he spotted Arslan, at the head of their group, rolling an imposing
boulder out of their path. Before him, Nadir and Reese were holding opposite ends of a collapsible stretcher, which held their pilot. As for him, he was the rear-guard, staff digging into the soft dirt Bolin flicked himself over another dip in the ground that was filled with stagnant water.

Idly he cast his gaze around their surroundings in case of Grimm, 'Nothing but bendy trees and vines,' he thought. Not that he was looking for a fight, but so much time in Grimm territory facing only a few stragglers was unnerving. Besides, he couldn't deny wanting a bit of payback against the monsters. His Aura was back from how much he'd killed trying to let their Bullhead keep pace with the Atlesian Specialist Ship, and the chance to take out his frustrations on a few Grimm wouldn’t be unwelcome.

After their somewhat cushioned crash, Arslan hadn't wasted anytime letting them get their bearings. She'd just jumped into the ship, pulled Nadir and Reese out before bundling him and Crim up under her arms and running while Nadir and Reese provided cover fire for their escape into the swamps.

Not even thirty seconds before they'd escaped, the Atleasian Specialist Ship and the Bullhead that froze their jets had dived towards their crashed vessel. That was enough to tell Bolin exactly why Arslan had opted to run instead of fight. 'The Grimm weren’t the problem, it was raiders,' he thought, biting his cheek. Bolin clenched and un-clenched his hands, feeling his Aura running under his skin, the bulk of it having come back once they'd cleared half a kilometre and they'd stopped to tend to Crim's wounds with what was left of their supplies, specifically the contents of Nadir's travel pack, Reese's backpack as well as his and Arslan's hip pouches. 'That's three fully stocked travel packs and whatever else was on the ship left for those Atlas bastards,' Bolin seethed.

"Sooo," Reese said from up ahead, and Bolin actually sighed in relief because finally, 'someone' was breaking the oppressive silence. "Who wants to guess what I'm looking forward to once we get home?"

Snorting Bolin used his free hand to shake out his sweaty pants, "I don't know, escaping swamp ass perhaps? This humidity’s a drag," He said.

"Hah, not to me, I like saunas, besides I bought these clothes to breath," Reese said, shaking her shoulders to show of her hoodie. "Nah, I'm really looking forward to seeing that new Spruce Willis movie. Arslan said if we did well and got our reports done on time we could go see it!"

"Oh yeah, hehe," Bolin said, rubbing his chin and grinning as he recalled the explosion filled trailer and liberal amounts of nudity. "I'd almost forgotten about that, guess when you're living the action hero lifestyle it all blends together."

"You guys remember we crashed the ship, right?" Nadir said, or more moaned. "I'm pretty sure we're way beyond failed at this point."

Rolling his eyes at Nadir's pessimism, Bolin said, "Don't be such a downer dude, so we got a bit roughed up, we'll bounce back."

"Yeah, I mean, no one was expecting some nutso Atlas Specialist to attack us," Reese said, almost skipping in place and suddenly reminding Bolin there was a fifth member to their party. Glancing back at their stretcher bound team member Reese, in a mirthless, cheery voice even, spoke, "How about you Crim, what do you wanna do once we get home?"

The stretcher bound pilot and mechanic merely groaned in response.
"Oh, right, unconscious, sorry!" Reese said.

'Well now this is just awkward.' Bolin thought.

They ground to a halt as Arslan threw her hand out, quietly she said, "We're nearing the Support Tower," she pointed through the tree cover towards.

After craning his neck a bit, Bolin nodded as he saw a particularly large hill with a faint bit of shiny metal poking up above the surrounding trees. His eye widened as a black mass moved and blocked his sight.

"I assume you all saw the Grimm," Arslan said tensely. "If one has taken over but the tower is still standing in some capacity the Grimm may be foolish or simply waiting. Given the automatic defences haven't been activated we can only assume they're offline, so it's just us. Here's the plan," she said, turning to face them fully. Pointing towards Reese and Nadir she said, "Its just the standard attack strategy, except you two will take Crim into the largest tree top and provide cover."

"So what are we waiting for?" Bolin asked, chuckling as he spun his staff around and with a pulse of Aura unleashed the tiny, but incredibly sharp blades hidden within the tips.

"Keep you mind on task, we don't have the luxury of retreat out here," Arslan said, her rough voice almost growling as she turned back around and said, "Ready?"

"Ready!" They all answered, Bolin even raising his staff up high, accidentally breaking a branch, but hey, he looked cool.

Not wasting another word Arslan jogged forward, silver dagger glinting in her right hand and a spark crackling in the other.

While Reese and Nadir made a straight line up the hill, Arslan and Bolin cut a winding crisscrossing path around their teammates. Ducking, jumping, running, leaping and weaving their ways through, around or between the trees. They were little more than faint-blurs and rustling leaves to the beasts and they delivered quick, fatal strikes to whatever Grimm that were approaching.

Seeing the Reese and Nadir hop into a wide hanging tree, Bolin readied to leap into action only for Arslan to explode into the air with an obvious roar.

'I know she needs the Grimm's attention, but come on, gimme a second!' Bolin thought. His Aura flowed through his body like a soft breeze on his skin and suddenly everything felt light and free. Practically floating on air, Bolin kicked off from the ground and broke through the tree line.

He was just in time to see Arslan body check a massive Nevermore off the top of the Support Towers roof. The two flew through the air, the Nevermore roaring like a raptor as it spread its wings and flipped through the air to throw Arslan off.

What sounded like a hundred keening cries rang out around him and Bolin smirked as a flock of smaller Nevermore surged towards him from the towers and the trees. Bolin flicked out his stave's sickles and began to whirl it around his body, a loud buzzing springing up as he spun across the open field. The swarming mass of squawking Grimm came from all sides only to be met by blades and painfully sharp strikes cutting and cracking their bodies into pieces before sending them flying.
'Either I'm just great, or these guys are awful,' Bolin thought as he ducked a triple bomber strike from three torso sized Nevermores. As they slammed into a nearby tree he heard gunfire tear through them before he even got the chance to. Bolin swiftly bent away from a larger Nevermore's dive and slammed it in the back, sending the Grimm tumbling to the ground. Only to take another from the air with his blades and slamming the tip of his staff into a thirds head.

Kicking off the Nevermore’s rock hard feathers, Arslan fell into a flip and her feet slammed against the Support Towers flat metal roof.

Gazing up at her foe, she watched as the Nevermore drifted low over the woods before giving its wings one giant flip that sent it surging into the air, the force tearing apart the trees below. It let out a mighty bellow that was met with a hundred more cries as its younger kin surge from the woods towards the tower.

The sound of gun fire and Bolin's laughter told Arslan she needn’t worry, though she could feel her chest tightening. Arslan watched as the Nevermore flipped over and flew towards her on giant wings, its eyes radiating a sickly red Aura.

Drawing her hands back in a tight circle, fire kindled in her palm, Arslan's pace increased and she dragged her arms forward. The Grimm threw its wings back and surged towards her. With a mighty strike that cracked the air, Arslan thrust her hands forward unleashing two roaring fireballs at the Grimm.

Startled, the Grimm made to lean out of the way. One fireball shot past, but the second crashed against its head. The explosive blaze surged forth and the Nevermore crowed in fury as an eye and nearly a quarter of its mask were rendered to flaming dust. Spreading its wings the Nevermore flew into the sky, sending out a gust of wind that kicked up a small hurricane of leaves and dust that swarmed over the hill.

Unshaken, Arslan flicked the bandage bound and faintly red hued dart-dagger into her hands from her wide sleeves. Arslan's Aura flexed, loosening her binding as she brought one arm up to guard and readied to pierce her foe.

Yet, the Nevermore was unwilling to charge her again, another sign of its age. Instead, the moment it became more like a dot in the sky than a Grimm, it bared its wings wide. With a single massive flap, it unleashed a flurry of feather that rained down like a storm of spears, so fast they were less than a blur. The Grimm ducked down and folded its wings as it torpedoed after them, intent on crushing the one who'd left its face so fractured and ruined.

'Curse it!' Arslan thought as she saw the Nevermore's wings fan out. Teeth grit she sent a hot pulse of Aura into the steel below her and crouched. As the mass of feather styled spears began to rain down upon her, Arslan's muscles and Aura tensed and flared. With a burst of strength she rocketed herself into the sky and swung her arm forward, her rope-dart hurtled into the air with a sharp whistle.

Grasping the bandages flying from her arms Arslan sent her Aura roaring through it like fire tore through dry grass. Dagger sparking with fire she dragged it back and with a flick sent her rope-dart cutting through the air, a trail of red light flowing after it.

Crashing against the first feather with a spark, her Aura rippled from the force, but Arslan felt a swell of pride as the first feather was sent off course. Dragging her arm and weapon back Arslan pulled on her core and felt her Aura pulse and swell. Another wave of energy surged through her,
body swelling and arms feeling like bound wire she snarled, unveiling her fangs.

But even as her body thrummed with power her mind stayed calm, focused, 'Focus, I am in control,' she thought. Her bandages continued to unravel and blow behind her.

Arslan sent her arm shooting down and up, left and right, her rope dart flowed with her and cut through the air in a red blur. It crashed and slashed against the Nevermore's feathers, sending them hurtling off course as they rained down upon her. What few slipped by her roe-dart were flying straight for Arslan herself and each one was met by a powerful strike from her limbs, shattering their frames with painful snaps.

As Arslan began to fall from the air, the exchange having taken a few mere second, she felt the air surge as the Nevermore dived past her. Her chest heaved and her teeth gnashed, 'No!'

Flinging herself around with a sharp kick, Arslan swung her rope dart around the Nevermore's chest, and made it dig into it's flesh. Arslan loosed her Aura-strengthened bandages and they enwrapped the Nevermore's chest, hissing as they were pulled taught.

'Get over here!' She thought, a snarl escaping her lips and her muscles singing from the strain as she heaved the massive Grimm back.

Coming to a lurching halt a few metres from it’s the ground-bound humans, the Nevermore tried to squawk, but found itself blurring through the air. A familiar sensation turned alien as its wings were left dragging in front of it and the winds beat against its back as the world zoomed away.

Arslan could feel the gravity around her wax and wane as she drew the Nevermore over her head like a yoyo. The monstrous creature screeched and thrashed against her bindings and her Aura strained under the pressure. Her fingers stung as she tried to heave the monster back against its furious beating wings. Her Aura surged through her, blood beating so loud it felt like her skull was going to burst, Arslan could feel her body stretch as her Aura buried itself in her skin. It dug into her bones and muscles, everything burned and she quaked under the strain as her muscles swelled, her skin awash in a golden light.

'Not here, not now!' She screamed. With a furious shout that crashed against the air with the same force as the Nevermore's swings Arslan's aura flooded her body and the bindings and the Nevermore was brought hurtling towards her. Spinning in the air Arslan drew back her first and just as the Nevermore's body came within a foot of her she struck.

The force of her blow sent a shock-wave across its body, splintering its iron skin and steel feathers flying before the Grimm burst open in a shower of red and black gore. The monsters entire body split in half and flew over her. Arslan flicked her rope-dart and pulled it back as the Grimm fell past the tower and came to slam into the base of the hill. Its body hissed as it began to fade and Arslan landed on the ground with a light clap from her soft soled shoes.

Looking to her team, most of whom were only just now extricating themselves from the tree Arslan called out. "We'll make camp here, Bolin keep watch, Nadir look after Crim, and Reese, you inspect the tower; I'm going to scout the surrounding area for another wave of Grimm. Be ready to fall back," she said, as she jogged passed her tea.

Just before she jumped into the woods she said, "Good work out there," and disappeared into brush.
Nadir let out a low grumble, though he was sure Bolin would say a 'whine'. His gloves had been put away as he sat next to Crim's unconscious body. The old -to Nadir, anyways- technician and pilot was breathing shallowly. His torn shirt and bloodied armoured vest were hanging from a tree branch up above, while Nadir tended to the man's bandages.

'Dang, damn, stupid, freaking, crap,' He thought wishing he knew more curses. Everything was such a mess, lost in Grimm territory, kilometres away from home, no Scrolls, and-

Nadir prodded Crim's new bandages, the blood wasn't seeping yet but, 'People should react when you touch their sore spots,' he thought.

His eyes trailed over the tiny mishmash of scratches. None had gotten too deep, but when mixed with the stagnant swamp water they'd run through, the Dust in the air and his waning Aura... Nadir shuddered.

Lathering his hands, and glad their thermos had survived so he could clean out the wounds, he began to apply the awful smelling antiseptic they'd brought. 'I hate this stuff, even with Aura it stings and it makes my eyes water,' Nadir thought. Crim's body was too hot, and sweaty, was it the humidity? 'Is he getting a fever? What if he's sick, or has a medical condition did we leave his medication? The water here's filthy what if-

"Ah!" Nadir's entire body jolted when he heard a loud clang behind him. Spinning around and drawing his gun he almost instantly drooped, adrenaline already wearing off as he saw Reese throwing a cracked metal pipe, outside the control towers door. He could just make out some wires and what tools she had left were evidently inside with the rest of her.

"You OK in there, Reese?" Bolin asked, breaking from his circular patrol around their clearing to twang his staff against the towers frame.

"Fine, some stuff dropped on my head, and I think there were like, rat Grimm or something, they're dead now," she said.

"Well don't scare us like that again," Nadir said, before turning back to Crim.

"Us?" Bolin chuckled.

"Oh shut up," Nadir shot back.

"Hey relax," Bolin said, holding up his hands as if to ward of Nadir's words. "Arslan will be back in a few, I mean, we haven't heard any fire so she's probably not fighting," he said, glancing at the oddly quiet forest. "And Reese will have the tower fixed soon, then we can call for a ship and head home, I mean, sans a Bullhead, but still," he shrugged.

"Yeah, if she can fix it, and we don't get eaten, or those psychos don't come back and start shooting at us, or-" Nadir wasn't ranting, he was talking too slowly, even if his pitch rose higher, he was just thinking, just-

Arslan slid from the brush without fanfare, and before he or Bolin could speak she squeezed his shoulder gently and said, "Calm," in that oddly rough but soft tone she used. "You're getting lost in your own head again, we need to keep everything in mind, but assuming the worst will just lure in Grimm."

"Ah, right, sorry, um, positive, right, haha," Nadir said, rubbing his neck as he tried to hide his embarrassment. He'd been trying to get over his nerves, but how other people outgrew the fear of being torn to shreds or shot up he'd probably never know.
"How is he?" Arslan asked, her olive eyes locked hard on Crim's downed body.

Nadir couldn't claim to be good at reading people but he could practically feel the tension radiating off of her. Sighing he shook his head, "Not good, I mean, I changed that rushed bandage job we did, I think we got all the glass out the first time, but he's feverish and, I don't know... Off?" he said plaintively. "I feel like he should be better than he is, I mean, he has Aura even if he's not a Hunter."

"It was a surprise, so the glass bypassed his Aura more easily than it should have, if it took enough off and afterwards he was jostled around..." Arslan said squatting at their pilots side. "Then his Aura may struggle to recover, especially if he hasn't trained it for such a task, and given he was a pilot and mechanic first and second," she shrugged, "That could be the case."

"Could you do that Aura swirling thing?" Bolin cut in.

Humming in the negative, Arslan shook her head and said, "That's a risky manoeuvre, more so when the subject is asleep. I will try it if his conditions worsens but if we can just keep him stable that should be enough, good work Nadir, Bolin."

Rising to her feet Arslan strode halfway into the camp and called, "Reese, how go the repairs?"

"Reese, how go the repairs?" Arslan called, her voice practically echoing all around Reese in the distressingly bare and mangled Tower interior.

"Um, wanna get back to me on that one in like, an hour?" She called back.

Reese glanced around her surroundings one last time, just in case, there was something she'd missed. Sadly, she didn't find any perfect lynch-pins or magic tools. Instead it was just a big, tall, machine which had been brutally rewired, literal cables just left hanging or cut an tied. Entire circuit boards had been ripped out or replaced by larger, clunkier devices that she could tell were home-brewed, but definitely had Atlas grade parts in them.

'The SDC logo's kinda hard to miss,' she thought, frowning even as she took another picture. What was more disturbing though were the completely unfamiliar parts that lacked all the distinguishing features of Atlas tech, but definitely weren't part of the Support Tower originally. 'Whoever did this is throwing together a lot of different stuff from lots of different places, and its all high end,' she thought, snapping a picture of the unfamiliar black and grey device with the blinking red light that had been embedded into what was left of the towers transponder. Flicking her Scroll shut Reese shook her head, silently wondering who should be so lucky to get access to such equipment.

Groaning she slumped her way out of the tower and back into the scalding natural sunlight to find her team spread around the camp, evidently waiting for her. Well, except for Nadir, he was still fussing over Crim. She hoped the dude would be all right, but unless he turned out to be a robot she couldn't do jack for him, which was pretty rough.

"What happened to another hour?" Arslan asked, arching her eyebrow as she stood with her arms folded.

Were it anyone else Reese might have suspected sarcasm, or maybe just a joke, but given her team leader... Yeah... Shaking her head Reese said, "Sorry boss, truth is I don't see an hour helping, like at all."

"What?" Nadir groaned, throwing his entire torso back with his head to look at them.
"Yeah what gives," Bolin said, as he ambled closer to them. "I thought you were meant to be our unofficial tech expert and all-purpose nerd."

"Bolin," Arslan snapped.

"Hey, don't blame me, and not just cos I'd rather you didn't," she amended before pointing back at the tower. "I just spent half an hour inside a- a massacred machine and there is nothing I can do with that poor thing."

Just as Bolin opened his mouth, contrary to Arslan's warning frowny face, Reese continued. "I mean yeah, you want me to fix your Scroll? Fine. Build the coolest weapon, ever? Sure," she said, a pulse of Aura running through her guns as she slammed them together and they folded, with the lovely hum of machinery, into a black lined, emerald-Gravity Dust filled, Hover board. "Want me to multiply some big numbers in my head? That I can also do as well. But I can't fix a ruined Quantum Entanglement tower with no equipment when half of its parts are gone!"

Stepping back and forming a little ’o’ with his mouth Bolin said, "Right, sorry."

"Its fine, Reese, we know you did your best," Arslan said, grasping both her shoulders and giving Reese that serious 'I speak the truth' look.

Grinning at their leader Reese was about to speak only, for Bolin to say, "So what's two thousand, six hundred and thirty seven, times ten thousand, two hundred and nine?"

"Wow, really, Bolin?" Nadir said as he trundled up to the group, wiping the sweet smelling antiseptic off his hands.

"What?" Bolin said, repressing a chuckle.

"Twenty six million, nine hundred and twenty one thousand and one hundred and thirty three," Reese said without missing a beat. The look on the two boys faces as they glanced at each other uncertainly left Reese grinning.

"Is that right?" Bolin asked.

Who he was asking she couldn't guess, but Reese said, “Yes, yes it is.”

"Wow," Nadir murmured.

"It was very impressive Reese, but this is not the time for trivia," Arslan said. Spinning around she waved them back over to Crim and peered into the forest from which she'd just emerged and spoke. "Reese, what else can you tell us about the towers state?"

"Well I can say this much, it wasn't any Grimm I ever heard of that did this, not unless they made some new tech savvy variety or something," she said. Waving at the scratch marks on the towers frame, Reese continued, "I mean, sure, they did some superficial damage but the rest..." she bit her bottom lip. "That was engineered, entire vital components have been removed or rerouted, and new stuff has been added."

"Sabotage?" Nadir asked, with a gulp.

"But why not just break it?" Bolin asked, huffing as he folded his arms.

"Whoever did it is still using it, aren't they Reese?" Arslan asked, spinning around to face her team.
Nodding, Reese said, "Yep, yep, this towers only quasi-operational at best. See what they did was turn it into a sort of... jammer, it sends a signal back to Mistral that says its working fine, but the lack of calls we've been getting from this sector eventually told us otherwise. I mean, this work was done months ago but only now does someone notices the discrepancy!" She said, waving her arms.

"Areas like this often don’t receive as much attention as those closer to the kingdom," Arslan said.

Shrugging, Reese continued, "It was probably those Atlas goons, they can definitely talk to each other but we’re in a dead zone that’s bad even for the wilds. They probably set up a hidden a frequency, a pirate channel, or something like that. They could even just have some really good radios and kept them low so no one else overhears their chatter. This entire sectors off map though, it’s been off the radar for at least six months."

Arslan hummed and finally said, "They must have simulated some calls to allay suspicion, or perhaps not." Her eyes were focused into slits as she digested the information. "I checked on the automatic defences, they've been taken apart, likely by our attackers."

"But why?" Nadir asked, eyeing the skies as he tried to repress a groan of worry. "Why's Atlas attacking the towers?"

Bolin just snorted, "Who knows, maybe to weaken Mistral enough that we need their 'protection'," he said with finger quotes. "Or perhaps they wanna start some kind of war then swoop in and end it or-"

"Or," Arslan cut him off, "its criminals using Atlesian technology, perhaps they're connected to a cartel or smuggling ring, or they're independent, we don't know."

Reese thought there was something tight to Arslan's voice, like a sigh she was holding back, as though she didn't 'like' giving Atlas the benefit of the doubt but... Maybe she was imagining it.

"We don't know enough to say, but this," she waved her hands, "does not strike me as military or Hunter supported action. It is organised though, and well, but it’s too short-sighted to be a kingdom's actions," Arslan said tersely, eyes training over the forest with obvious suspicion.

“And how do you figure that?” Nadir asked.

“Yeah, is this another one of those things you ‘just have’ to have learnt growing up outside Mistral?” Bolin said.

"It’s the Grimm," she finally said, "The Grimm, or at least, the elder ones understand what's going on. That's why one was roosting here, it’s why the Nevermore's only attacked our ship. They must understand on some level, that whoever was attacking us will lure in more people for them to kill, thus, they are ignored... For now at least."

Reese shivered, heck she was pretty sure Bolin did too, and Nadir was straight up quaking.

Perhaps seeing their worry Arslan said, "Relax, we can defeat them no matter what comes our way, and if not, I'll ensure we can escape," she said firmly, her fists clenched tightly. "Grimm have always been like this, waiting on the sides of battlefields, lured towards camps by violence or letting despair fester until more of them come."

Motioning towards the tower she said, "That's why I also don't believe this is Atlas, or even the SDC," that part was added grudgingly, Reese thought. "They gain nothing from a Grimm ruled continent, they need trade, fighters... miners," she added. "They would keep control of the towers, they would have pursued us with Specialists, not left us to the Grimm.”
"This is smaller. Dangerous, but smaller than an invasion; though it may be headed up by Hunters who have turned their backs on the people. It would explain the pilot’s response time and how such a group could survive long enough to create such a system. I think, what we are dealing with, are brigands, or pirates, some form of gang, who are co-opting the towers for their own purposes and gunning down trespassers for supplies. Once the Grimm are done picking over the remains,” Arslan’s words suddenly ground to a halt at Nadir’s wide eyed stare.

Shaking her head she said, "Whatever the case, we need to find a village and determine our next course of action, as well as get Crim treated..." Arslan trailed off, tilting her head to one side.

Reese heard Bolin say, "Hey, anyone else hear an engine?"

"Oh crap, they're coming back!" Nadir said, pulling out his rifle.

Bounding up to the top of a tree Arslan scanned the swamps below and hissed. "Ready yourselves, and get Crim inside the tower," she ordered.

Six figures, four travelling along the ground, and keeping pace with a hover bike that held the last two members. 'They're trained, have access to equipment and,' she squinted and caught the flash of a mighty steel scythe, 'weapons, well outside the bounds of a normal village, and they're coming right for us.'

Snorting Arslan bled into the tree-line, the Dust bound other pulsing and radiating with energy as her body tensed in preparation to pounce, "They didn't leave us to the Grimm after all.'

"I think I saw something," Blake said to her team as she leapt from tree to tree.

"Do you think the pirates know about us coming here?!" Yang asked, as she lunged over a particularly deep pool of water.

"There was that ship I saw on my scope a little while ago, but I lost sight of it!" Ruby shouted, the water splashing as she soared over it.

"I don't want to think the others might have warned the pirates but-" Escuo started.

"We really can't say, they could have been listening in on the radio for all we know!" Ginger said, swerving the bike around a recently toppled tree.

"Then we'd best be ready for a fight!" Weiss said sharply. "If they have warning we're coming, they'll have sent a suitably strong band of fighters no doubt and could even be trying to destroy the tower!"

As they hurtled up the hill and finally broke through the tree line, entering a wide circular patch of land, they spied the open door of the Support Tower.

"All right," Yang growled, slamming her fists together, the familiar metal 'clink' still being painfully absent. "Come on out!"

"Screw you!" Someone shouted from inside.

A black assault rifle poked out and-
Someone shouted something about dodging or shooting.

Someone had already opened fire.

Something that sounded like an explosion rang out.

In an instant, the field was filled with blurred bodies and gun fire, as they rushed into battle, people poured from the tower and leapt from the trees.

The battle was joined.

Chapter End Notes

And that was 'Meet the New Team' just like the old team, but kind of not ;) I hope this was an enjoyable chapter, thank you Person With Many Aliases for beta reading and discussing this story with me and to everyone who has faved, followed, liked and commented on The Knights Errant so far. I imagine this shift may be a bit of a surprise, especially to those who don't follow the SB discussion board, suffice to say this is something I have been hoping to do for ages, having developed quite a fondness for ABRN since seeing some great fanart and short stories with them (particularly the team mum Arslan stuff)

In truth the pirates story and the battleship Beowolf battle were once separate arc ideas, with the former being Knights Errant teaming up with ABRN, and the latter involving them meeting SSSN. However my difficulties with writing SSSN and the fact neither story quite felt like it could carry itself led me to fusing them. I naturally had to do a lot of building based on what little we saw and with some fanon, but I hope ABRN are shaping up to be interesting to read about. I used the last chapter as a jumping off point for a time-skip and a perspective switch, however things should return to primarily 'Knights Errant' after this, but still with ABRN involved.

As a minor aside, Arslan is basically what you get in terms of personality and fighting style if you fused Ren and Yang into one person. Nadir's nervous pessimistic personality developed almost by accident, but is still meant to be grounded in his behaviour in the tournament and the Battle of Beacon (He's definitely the most sensitive of ABRN) Reese ended up being a little distant from what one might consider 'the norm' which started with her being chill about Crim's state and grew from there (Many are shocked by how casual she is in odd situation) Bolin is quite cocky like in the tournament, I based his Semblance off his seemingly surprising jump in speed that left Ruby going "what!?" (It could also be Dust based if he is established to have a Semblance later, hehe)

Once again, thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It barely took a moment for the field to descend into the anarchy of battle.

It was a familiar situation, one Blake took to with human opponents even more readily than she did Grimm. A boom rang out behind her, as Ruby and Yang clashed with an orange blur and rifle fire poured at them from the tower.

'Take out their support, wear down the stronger fighters with numbers,' she thought. Old lessons but no less true.

Launching herself from her afterimage, Blake flashed towards the pink haired gunner by the door. Gambol Shroud blurred through the air deflecting and bisecting bullets. His eyes widened in fear as she bore down upon him, 'A novice-

In a flash of green and purple, a fighter shot in the air with an electric buzz. Bouncing off the door frame she flipped through the air and thrust her hover board forward with a double kick.

Meeting the strike with Gambol Shroud's cleaver Blake grunted. 'One arm versus two legs, bad combination,' she thought.

Before Blake could retreat, the whine of the hover board rose. There was a chuckle, before a blast of Aura sent her flying back. Blake barely forced herself upright with another afterimage and found herself battering away another wave of bullets as the green and purple girl rushed to meet her.

'This might be harder than I thought,' Blake thought as she skidded away from her foes, her slide throwing up dirt and grass.

The Red one was charging him, Bolin barely had a second to prepare himself as he brought his staff up to his side. His body lightened when he was struck by her war scythe's blade and he was sent flying by the massive grinding hunk of metal. The world blurred and tumbled around him. Bolin threw himself into a spin and let his Aura bloat and his hectic spin came to a smashing halt as he slammed into the earth.

Pulling her scythe up, she yanked back the trigger and with a clamorous bang unloaded a round at him. Bolin met the first with his staff, feeling the bullet clap against his Aura infused weapon, he slammed it aside and it crashed into the ground making a crater, 'Strong shots!'

Something hot was coming up above, every instinct cried out, 'Move!' Bolin felt his Aura flicker as he dived. A glowing ball of gold and fire slammed into the ground where he'd stood, the roar of her attack and the exploding earth, second to the force of the shock-wave she sent up.

Slamming his staff into the ground, Bolin flipped over another bullet and watched as the golden fighter bared down on him like a Boarbtusk.
He couldn't help the nervous gulp.

Weiss conjured a line of Glyphs before herself and skated forward, Myrtenaster drawn back as she charged. The platinum blonde fist fighter, slipped something silver from her wide golden sleeves and met Weiss's blurred thrust with the butt of her dagger.

The air cracked form the force of their strikes, 'It's like hitting Yang!' Weiss realised as her teeth vibrated in her skull.

Blazing forward, the woman attacked her in a wide slash. Dragging herself back a step, Weiss could sense the woman charging her, torso and arms hanging low like she was some kind of lion going in for a pounce.

Smirking, Weiss fell into a defensive stance, daring the blonde to attack. 'Perfect!' She thought at the woman's strike, faster than Yang's, but not fast enough. Weiss slammed her hands together and conjured a massive black Glyph. Crashing against its surface the blonde was thrown back, hopping along the ground to take her distance and-

'Too controlled, she's gauging me,' Weiss thought. Holding her left hand out as if asking for a dance Weiss beckoned her foe to her, or so it would look. Behind the knife fighter a dozen Glyphs sprung, their high trill the only thing that alerted her to the rubble Weiss was launching at her at the speed of gunfire.

The blonde ducked below the first wave and flipped her way around the second. As more and more debris flew towards her she began redirecting them with cupped palms and sweeping kicks.

Dancing her way around the redirected rubble, Weiss pointed two fingers skyward and summoned another Glyph below her foe. The woman tried to flip out of its grasp, but the gravity pulse sent her floating up beyond what martial arts could compensate for.

'Just like Yang, don't get close or you're done,' Weiss reminded herself. Halting her charge, Weiss jumped up, still well away from the woman and thrust Myrtenaster forward. The Gust Dust within whirled as a dense tornado began to form-

Something silver glinted in the air and Weiss felt something pointed dig into her heel, 'No!'. The binding around her ankle tightened and a violent, dragging force, sent her flicking like she was the tip of a whip. There was a mighty snap as her Glyphs and tornado broke from the force and Weiss felt the world surge past her as she was dragged downward, trapped in a wind tunnel of force.

Then a golden blur tore through the air.

Arslan had been watching the other fights as best she could. Reese and Nadir were keeping pace, with the dark haired woman thanks to their tag team, maybe even pushing her back. Bolin was being overwhelmed though, the red scythe wielder and the blonde together had kept him running until she'd swept the fencer up.

Now, Bolin was just fending off the red one; alternating his defence between light as a feather, and
dense as a boulder, he could fend her off, but Arslan could tell whose stamina would flag first.

'And now the strongest comes to me,' she thought, at the blazing figure slamming into the ground before her. The blondes strike drove Arslan’s bindings into the ground, breaking her momentum and letting her target escape.

"Go help Blake!" She ordered, looking at Arslan with barely concealed excitement, eyes shining red and white teeth bared in a snarl as she dug her boots into the ground and lunged forward.

Arslan's focus wavered a moment, something about the woman's motion looked wrong, like she was unused to it, but still practised. She didn't have another moment more to think though, as the blonde rushed her with a searing right hook.

Arslan leaned out of the way of the blow, legs skirting back to keep balance. 'Strong!' She thought, looking at the swollen muscles and the woman's furious, pulsating Aura. She whipped her right arm back, bringing her knife to her, as the blonde ducked and weaved closer, with her guard up.

'Don't give up the momentum,' Arslan cursed herself, kicking off to the side and making a swipe for her foes red eyes.

The woman brought an arm up to guard but tensed from the strike, 'Is she not used to blows like this?' Arslan wondered.

Flaring her Aura, the heat rose and her foe threw herself away from the attack, kicked off from the ground as she turned to face Arslan again and pulled out her own knife.

Arslan flicked her rope dart back into her sleeve and withdrew her dagger before rushing at the blonde. Meeting her charge, they lunged forward, knees crashing together with enough force that the air roared and the ground rumbled as it was torn up.

'Powerful!' Arslan thought. Her heart beat faster, her blood was flowing and her core flared excitedly, Aura coiling out from within faster and faster.

Not wasting a second, they both lashed out, knives clashing together with a metallic clang that rang out across the battlefield. Teeth bared, the woman growled at Arslan as she tried to push forward with her dagger, even as she drew her left arm back. Muscles bound tight like wire Arslan jammed the hilt of her dagger into the woman's fingers, even as it offered her foe leverage.

With a shout, the blonde unleashed her strike.

Arslan's left hand shot out, her palm crashed against the side of the woman's fist; half spinning around her foe, throwing the woman off balance. The momentary slackening of grip was all she needed. Arslan spun her dagger in her hand and slammed the guard against the blade of her attacker and sent the knife flying from her hand.

'Good, but basic,' Arslan thought as she spiralled around the flaming blonde. Lashing out with a kick she was met with the red eyed warrior slamming one foot into the ground, and spinning her torso to meet her kick with arm.

The shock wave they unleashed, rippled through the earth, but the swift desperation of their blows robbed the strikes of their full potential. Tensing Arslan pushed in deeper against the blonde and used her as a springboard to kick away.
Sliding back along the earth, the woman sent her a smirk as she came to a halt and dropped her guard entirely. With a slash of her arms her Aura surged and writhed around her in golden fire.

'She wants this too,' Arslan thought, her body straining against itself as her muscles shook and swelled. Drawing herself back Arslan sent the woman a toothy grin and rushed forward, arms drawn back, no defence to speak of, just pure momentum, pure power.

'Or so I'd like,' a tiny voice reminded her as she saw her team struggling off to the side. 'I need you gone for a moment, please oblige me warrior.'

Squeezing her core Arslan sent a massive pulse of Aura into her right arm as she rushed to meet the blonde. Their feet slammed against the ground and she tightened it, compacted it, until it was a roiling mass of concentrated power ready to burst from her insides. Their fist's flew towards each other and Arslan shouted, "Jump!" a mere instant before they crashed together.

The sound rang out like an avalanche, red and gold flashed through the air in a massive wave and the ground surged in every direction. Her own team had just scarcely braced for it, her foes, had not, and were off balance.

Her foe came in for a furious left punch, Arslan leaned back and hooked her foot around the blonde's own and yanked her feet out from under her. The red eyed fighter's strike glanced over her shoulder and stung her Aura, but Arslan dropped low, before her opponent could try to grab her. Just as the woman above her flipped in the air, Arslan shot up. Delivering a double palmed shockwave strike to the woman's chest, Arslan heard her gasp as she was sent rocketing into the sky.

"Yang!" The red scythe wielder shouted.

'Yang, a good name,' Arslan thought as she rushed to join her team, the fire inside her surging and clawing for escape.

The moment Yang was sent hurtling into the sky the tide of battle swung the other way. Ruby’s brief moment of fear was capitalised on by her opponent. The staff wielder lashed out with an audible cheer. She didn't think to dodge, instead blocking his overhead swing. Only to feel her knees buckle and the ground gave way as her feet sunk into the dirt from the sheer weight of his strike.

'Weight manipulation, gravity control, he has to have something like that!' Ruby realised. A swirl of rose petals burst around her as though caught in a swirling wind. Yet, even the extra force of her Semblance only let her old his strike in place instead of free, while he used his greater leverage to press down against Crescent Rose.

Ruby couldn't see what Blake was doing, but she saw Weiss try to block the blonde's strike with a Glyph only for the shock wave to send her hurtling back. The blonde looked staggered, but charged after Weiss.

'She's taking out our most dangerous!' Ruby realised, eyes widening in horror. She and Blake were strong, but they could be fragile and worn down more easily than Yang ever could. And while softer than any of them, Weiss's Glyphs meant she could make any of them hit as hard as Yang and...
turn Yang into an avatar of destruction. *This is different from fighting Grimm or just one guy,* Ruby thought, her insides cold at the thought.

Catching the cocky glint in her foes eyes, Ruby squeezed Crescent Rose tighter for just a moment, a silent apology ringing in her mind before she let her weapon go. The man surged down but without his weight pressing down on her. Ruby's Aura swirled and she exploded from the ground in a shower of dirt and grass.

She came to a skidding halt at the other end of the clearing, the boy was reaching for Crescent Rose, trying to keep her weapon from her when she charged back.

*That won't be enough,* Ruby thought, dropping into a sprinters stance, cape flaring and petals swirling behind her. She caught sight of Blake from the corner of her eyes, using after images to stay ahead of her foes, but the Faunus's stamina was draining under their combined assault. Any attempt to strike was blocked and met with another attack, any dodge was followed by a wave of gun fire.

Her silver eyes widened as she caught the blondes’ olive eyes land on hers and the woman shouted, "Bolin!" even as she slid and weaved her way around Weiss's Glyphs defences, when she wasn't just smashing through them.

'Bolin' braced, holding Crescent Rose and his staff in a cross guard, the ground sinking under his weight.

Ruby smirked, as she flared her Aura, a wave of force flowing through her, Ruby shot forward towards him- then broke off, going for Blake.

Flipping out of the way of another hover-board sweep attack, Blake tried to deflect the next stream of bullets, eyes flashing across the battlefield. Ginger and Escuo had fled for the tower the moment their bike was hurled away. Weiss was being overwhelmed by the blondes’ mix of flexibility and strength, Yang was straight up gone and Ruby-

A red blur swept under the gunner boys legs and sent him hurtling into the air. Ruby skidded to a halt at her side, hands dragging in the ground and she said, "Crescent R-

"Got it," Blake said.

The blonde lashed out with a rope dart and dragged the pink-haired gunner to her side, even as she and the staff wielder went for Weiss as the evident leader ordered her fighters to, "Fall in!"

Ruby at her side, Blake shot forward, cleaver drawn back as they bypassed the hover boarder and the gunner was still trying to roll to his feet.

Turning to face them the blonde lashed out with a fireball that sent Ruby leaping off course to dodge as the tore into the ground.

'Damn,' Blake hissed, as she launched herself forward with an after image anyway. She stopped above the blonde and slammed her blade into the woman's dagger with a loud crash. Spying her target, Blake launched herself backwards and unleashed Gambol Shroud's ribbon-bound gun. The blonde unleashed a hot shock-wave that thrashed against her skin and sent Blake into the air.
Eyes half closed as she flew back, Blake managed to snap her bindings around Crescent Rose while Ruby swerved into the melee and skidded out with Weiss. The former heiress conjured a flickering Glyph below her foe's feet that left them staggered for just a moment.

’All I need,’ Blake thought, yanking Crescent Rose away from its jailer.

Not even waiting, Ruby jumped into the air and grasped it, tugging Blake back down to where her side where they took up defensive stances.

’Just in time,’ she thought as the four person team before them came together in a tightly bound defensive formation and a loud burning hit their ears as something dropped from the… sky.

Yang slammed into the ground bare metres behind with a savage roar as she spat out a, "Guys!"

"We're OK!" Ruby shouted as the now flame shrouded Yang jumped to her side.

Each one of them leaned forward and readied to charge, their foes bracing for what was to come; a "Round two," was muttered just as they rushed forward as one and-

"They're Hunters!" Escuo shouted.

"They're Hunters! Ginger bellowed.

"You're all Hunters!" they cried together, waving their arms from behind the towers walls.

"What!?” Ruby and Weiss screamed as they staggered forward, practically tripping over each other. Yang skidded to a halt, the pink gunner literally fell on his backside and started panting. He accidentally hit the staff wielder, leaving the man staggering back, cursing under his breath as he looked around blushing.

Blake shot back as the hover boarder tried to undo her aerial swipe at her, only to end up falling from her board onto their leader woman's back with an "Eek!" Their leader was looking at Yang with wide eyes, a half formed defence made as the two twitched, as if trying to hold back from striking each other anyway.

Slowly, each of the eight Hunters turned to the hiding duo and mutually said, "What?"

’Well... This is awkward,’ Ruby thought.

After being interrupted mid-fight, the blonde lady with the rope dart and fireballs, ’Arslan, I think?’ Ruby thought, had ordered her team to inspect the tower and they'd revealed a wounded man in Haven Academy equipment.

Now the two teams sat opposite each other on the pockmarked ground, with about a metre of dirt between them. Ginger and Escuo were off to the side, nervously rubbing their hands together while the unconscious person was behind the team of Hunters.

A line of eight eyes seemed to bore into Ruby and her friends, all of them wary and suspicious. ’Can't we all just get along?’ She wanted to say, or maybe more squeak. Glancing at her own team however... Ruby figured that wouldn't help much. Blake was impossible to read and impassive, Weiss looked very suspicious as she practically squinted at the other Hunters, and Yang was
twitching with unspent energy and annoyance.

"So," the blonde woman said, her voice was rough and tight, like she smoked a lot, Ruby thought. "You are a team of Huntresses? I've not seen you at Haven and neither Beacon nor Atlas students traditionally cross the sea."

'OK this could already be going better!' Ruby thought, hoping against hope-

"Yeah, we're Huntresses," Yang snorted as she folded her arms and glowered. "We were hired by Shorelight to look into some strong fighters who've been making a mess of the local CCT Support Tower, which you guys were messing with. Don't suppose you have any credentials, other than some guy who could be a hostage, do you?"

'OK this could be going way, way better!' Ruby silently screamed. She tried to send the other Hunters a smile that they hopefully wouldn't find threatening. The only one who didn't frown back was the green haired girl, who was rocking her weapon on her lap. Ruby’s eyes trailed over the Hover boards Black metal frame and Dust-layered infusion core that turned into dual revolvers. 'What was I thinking about again?'

"Being hired by locals is an easy thing to claim," The blonde said, before pulling out her Scroll. "Credentials however, are much harder to fabricate." Pressing a button on her Scroll it projected an image of her with the name 'Arslan Altan' next to it along with the symbol of Haven Academy. Below it, was a profile that included information such as, 'second year' and 'Leader of team ABRN' accompanied by smaller pictures of her team.

"Well, hehe," Yang stalled as she tapped her hip pouches, "We aren't really tied to any academy, more freelancers."

That got several arched eyebrows and a muttered, "Unaffiliated Huntresses."

Then the staff wielder leaned in next to his leader and whispered something.

"Freelancer Huntresses," Arslan started, before pointing at Weiss, "and the 'missing' Schnee Heiress?" Her eyes seemed to hover on Blake for a moment before she said, "Quite eclectic company."

"Well you can be assured that I am Weiss Schnee," Weiss said.

"I seriously love your music," The hover boarder said, seemingly losing interest in their teams staring contest.

Ruby decided she liked the hover boarder, and added, "I know, great isn't it?!"

Before they could get off track however, Weiss coughed into her fist and muttered a 'thank you', before continuing. "So, we all know who we are then? I feel it’s our turn to ask a question, what are you doing out here? Or more to the point, why has it taken Mistral so long to respond to this deplorable situation?"

Arslan seemed to bristle at the comment before answering, "I don't assign missions, just complete them. And I think the question of what your intents out here were, is still an important one, you may be a recognisable face but what is your situation, and your... company?"

"Are you trying to implying something there?" Blake said tightly, her face hidden behind her cloaks hood.
"Was something implied with that remark about Haven?" Arslan shot back. "We came to investigate the tower because of the low level of contact received from this sector. What are you doing out here with a missing person?"

"I've been declared missing?" Weiss asked, anger momentarily forgotten.

"Or dead," The green haired girl said disinterestedly, pulling her lime backpack from her back and into her lap.

"Look, you can ask Escuo and Ginger over there," Ruby said, gesturing to the two natives. "We agreed to escort them here so they could fix the tower and call for help against these pirates that have been ruining things here."

"Escuo and Ginger were registered names on the tower's volunteer repair list," The girl cut in again. There was a crinkling plastic sound that twinged Ruby's ears. She looked at the hover boarder and grinned as she pulled free a bag of marshmallows, a little squashed but so fluffy.

"Really, Reese?" Arslan seemed to sigh, harsh presence ruined as her smaller team mate popped the bag open.

"I was hungry," She said simply.

"You brought marshmallows, can I have one?" Ruby asked.

"If you made that Sniper Scythe of yours, we can split the bag," She said with wink.

"I did!" Ruby said, as they began shuffling closer together under the watchful eyes of their team mates. "I named her Crescent Rose, and how about that hover board of yours, you had to have made that, right?"

"You can tell?" Reese asked.

"Oh of course, one designer to another, that personal tender love and care just shows," Ruby said as she popped a fluffly white marshmallow into her mouth and absorbed the squishy sweet flavour.

"So," Yang said with a broad clap of her hands, "This was all just a misunderstanding. We thought you might be the pirates, and I guess you guys assumed we were some kinda crooked as well?" Yang asked.

Rubbing the bridge of her nose Arslan said, "That appears to be the case. I thought you were connected to the ones that shot our airship out of the sky, coming to make sure we couldn't repair the tower."

"Which," Escuo said, coughing a little as he raised his hand as if in a classroom. "Which we still can't fix," he sighed. "We got a look inside and it's stripped bare. The supplies we brought just... aren't enough from the looks of things, I thought they'd just turned it off or broke some wiring, but this is beyond us I'm afraid."

"Yeah, they were really rough on it," Reese garbled out through a full mouth.

"Reese," Arslan muttered.

"But," she gulped down her mouthful, "They were pretty good at doing what they needed. With the alterations they made and the supplies we have there's no fixing it now, not without more stuff."
"Great, just great," the pink-haired gunner grumbled, his voice rising higher as he said, "So what are we meant to do now?!"

"Nadir, calm down," Arslan ordered blandly. "We'll take time to recuperate and come up with a plan to deal with the perpetrators of these attacks, or a means to inform Mistral."

"Yeah this whole mission looks like a mulligan now," Yang said, running her hands through her hair. "Unless those pirates are kind enough to swing by and let us shoot-em out of the sky our ships not going to be getting repairs for a while and we don't exactly have a Support Tower in our pockets."

“We could destroy the faux signal the tower is sending out so Mistral knows it’s down, but that could alert the pirates, as I doubt they wouldn't have set up fail-safes,” Arslan said.

“And even on a good week it can take far too long for the kingdoms to respond to a downed tower,” Blake added.

"Guys," Ruby said, "You have to try some of these, Reese has like three bags full, and after that fight, I bet we're all hungry."

"These are the extra weight ones as well," Reese said, squeezing one in her fingers. "They have at least three times the amount of kilos and energy as a normal marshmallow, they're real good for getting back energy."

Shrugging Weiss said, "People do think better on full stomachs."

"Well, I mean, if you are offering," the staff wielder said, grinning as he scooched closer.

"You know these would be even better if they were cooked," Escuo murmured as he plucked one up.

Yang bristled, sliding back past Blake and clutching her hair protectively. "Oh no, I am not letting you guys get marshmallow gunk in my hair again!"

"It was just once," Blake muttered.

Sighing Arslan squatted down next to the now much tighter circle, the pink gunner at her side. She held her palm out and with a tiny pulse of Aura conjured a small, but very hot flame.

As Ruby and Reese united their brilliant engineering skills to turn several sticks into cooking implements and Yang slowly slipped back into the group with a wary Blake at her side, Arslan said, "Try not to get goop on my hands."

In the end, the decision was a fairly simple one. Without the ability to fix the CCT Support Tower there was no reason to stay there. Especially not with the lingering possibility that a large Grimm might be rallying its kind to retake the spot. A truce was brokered between the Knights Errant and ABRN of Haven, and they all agreed to regroup in Shorelight for rest and to ensure at least one town's safety.

Escuo and Ginger were understandably glum despite their brief spot of activity during 'lunch'. The only highlight being that, with Yang and Reese, they'd been able to jump start the bike so they could ride back instead of walking.
"All right, we need to assign positions for the travel to Shorelight, Escuo, Ginger and Crim need to be guarded in the centre, yes?" Arslan said, half lidded eyes taking in Weiss's raised hand.

"Blake and I would be happy to carry your pilot, to make up for putting him in danger earlier," Weiss said cheerily.

"We're still pretty worn out from the fight as well, and the less said about our ammo situation the better," Blake added.

"I see, thank you," Arslan said simply, stepping back and letting the monochrome duo, gather up the stretcher.

"Ruby and I can take the lead," Yang said with a wave.

"I'd prefer Bolin or myself be up there as well," Arslan said, gesturing towards Ruby, "Would you mind taking up the rear-guard? With your sniper rifle you can offer excellent supporting fire."

"No problem, Reese wanna join me? I still wanna ask about recoil combat mechanics," Ruby said cheerily.

"I am so up for that," Reese said, kicking off from the dirt and swerving up to Ruby with a grin on her face.

With all the subtly of a particularly eager horn dog Bolin shouted, "I'll take up the front with Yang if no one minds!"

Yang chuckled and rolled her eyes at the boys' behaviour before shrugging and saying, "Hey I'm easy."

'OK, I know that was intentional,' Blake thought. She could feel Arslan's eyes raking across the formation.

Finally the blonde said, "Nadir and I are in the middle then, if we're all prepared, let’s go."

The forest hadn't changed much in the half an hour since she'd last traversed it, Yang decided. The loose path they'd cut with the bike was still noticeable, and made for easy walking, through the twisting over hanging trees of the hill, that would soon give way to the flatter wetlands.

'Of course, at the rate we're going it will be night before we get back, even if we jog all the way,' Yang thought.

Despite his earlier looks, the bo-staff wielder was keeping his mind on task as they kept to the front. If, perhaps, walking with more swagger than was strictly necessary. Not that Yang couldn't respect a show of confidence, the boy clearly wanted a fight, maybe just for his pride, maybe for fun, or to show off.

Whatever the case, she was getting bored and with eight fighters, even if Blake and Weiss were on support, she doubt there was much that could threaten them that they wouldn't see coming a mile away. With that in mind she opted to do some digging, sending Bolin a friendly grin and motioned back to their teams with her eyes she spoke, "So, your team always so cheery?"

Chuckling he said, "Reese, yeah, just don't get her mad or she'll have a tantrum. Nadir is just one of those nervous types, though he's more fun back on campus, and Arslan's kinda always serious.
Plus, she’s probably a bit worried about Crim." He looked back and frowned as his eyes fell on their pilot.

"Did you guys know him well?" Yang asked softly.

"No, first time meeting him today," Bolin said, jamming his staff into the ground as he hopped over a mud pocket. "But Arslan takes her job as leader and the whole 'guardian'," he finger quoted, "role of Huntresses really seriously."

"Well there's worse things to be than a worry wort," Yang said, trying to drag some levity back to her temporary partner.

Smirking Bolin whispered, "Heh, give her time and she'll be on all of you about getting enough sleep and eating healthy foods."

Yang threw back her head and let out a barking laugh at that.

"So how about you guys, how'd two Vale girls end up with a runaway heiress and lady mysterious back there? I mean come on, there's got to be a good story behind that," Bolin asked, sending her a lopsided grin.

"Oh it’s quite a tale, but its one's you should be asking them though," Yang said. Hearing his 'aw' of disappointment, she continued, "I could tell you about how we rode on a Nevermore's back and crashed it, if you’re interested."

"I am all ears."

Weiss flexed her fingers around the handles of the stretcher she was holding behind her. The hill had given way to wide open wetlands with only clusters of forested areas and masses of tall grass that could provide cover for the Grimm. 'I'm glad we killed our way through the weaker ones on our way here,' Weiss thought.

The ground squished under her heels and Weiss failed to repress a Grimace as she tried to keep the stretcher stable, forever grateful her heels kept the sludge out. All things considered, save for the unconscious man in the stretcher, she couldn't deny feeling jealous of everyone else in their little convoy.

'Yang and Ruby, chatting up a storm. Blake's in some kind of 'who's the most taciturn contest' and Escuo and Ginger at least have the bike' She thought. The hover bike itself was by no means a quiet beast. Whirring at her side, the air it radiated chilling Weiss's ankles and making her skirt flutter.

Taking a moment to glance at Nadir, Weiss watched the boys's eyes as they tried to shift in every direction at once. He clutched his rifle tightly, there was a faint clicking, jostling, every few seconds like he thought they were about to be attacked then thought better of it.

'How did someone so nervous not get blown out of the water by Blake in a few seconds?' Weiss wondered. She'd had enough training on reading people to pick up on mood, even if Yang insisted she needed to 'work on it', and she could tell the boy was a ball of nerves and broody tension.

'Speaking of which,' Weiss thought as her eyes trailed over Ginger and Escuo. The duo had a sorrowful set of expressions, eye tight with worry, and bodies rigid as they guided the bike across the planes. Truly, a stark contrast to their nervous enthusiasm from before.
'But then who can blame them? No tower, no transport, no plan!' Weiss thought. She sucked in a deep breath of muggy air and seethed; it had been months since she’d felt so helpless, so... useless.

Shaking her head, Weiss felt her side-tail whip through the air, 'OK, if no one else is going to say anything I'll just have to,' she thought. 'Distractions, distractions, distractions... Well now why didn't I think of that before?'

Looking to the left, Weiss locked eyes with Nadir for a moment and spoke. "Nadir, with these dreadful state of affairs, I'm sure you can guess that little in the way of news is making its way to places such as Shorelight. I don't suppose there's anything of interest you might know?" Hopefully something that would lift some spirits given how broody her section of the convoy seemed to be. Weiss couldn't make out the clipped conversation sparking between Blake and Arslan which seemed to be half growls, but she could only guess it wasn't friendly. Some good news, any news, would be a nice distraction at any rate.

"Oh, uh," Nadir stammered as her, Escuo and Gingers eyes all fell on him. It almost felt cruel to shove him into the spotlight Weiss felt. He rallied though and said, "Well, the Vytal Festival's coming up to Vale, if we get back from this, our team is actually slated to compete as well."

Brushing past his pessimism, Weiss smiled and said, "That's quite an accomplishment, I hadn't even thought about that, but I guess it is drawing near. Do you know the other Haven Teams competing?"

"Some of them," he said, tone lightening as he seemingly came to be distracted. "We kind of hang out with team SSSN sometimes, most of the others are fourth years. Arslan's also been scopeing out team CMEN since we don’t share classes with them; they're scholarship students or transfers," he added rolling his lips uncertainly. "Or something like that, but they're good, though uh, not the most talkative. I think they come from outside Mistral." His eyes flew to Escuo and Ginger and he mumbled, "Not that people from outside the kingdoms aren't social or anything!"

The chuckle that Ginger let out was a relief, and Weiss could practically feel the mood lighten. That was when she heard her name being muttered by Blake, turning her head back she asked, "What are you two whispering about back there?"

Blake could smell the tension in the air. It wasn't coming from Ruby or Reese, those two were nothing but smiles, confusing lingo and jargon. Bolin and Yang were, Blake sniffed the air as the wind changed. 'They're calm enough, ready for a fight, but hardly off,' she thought. Comparatively Escuo and Ginger were obviously worried, but Blake lacked the experience to offer them anything, though Weiss was trying to engage them.

As for the remaining two members of ABRN, Nadir was on the left side of the bike, gun up and clearly nervous, not tense, just worried. She’d seen his like in the White Fang, in the heat of combat they could fall back on training, but outside of it, there was simply too much to think about and it was far too easy for their nerves to consume them.

'As for Arslan,' Blake thought, turning her amber gaze towards the Huntress, 'She's tense.' It wouldn't be easy to tell, under the thick robes or her smooth motions, but hidden from human senses was the scent of boiling frustration. Her eyes scanned the wetlands, her team, ears twitching at every silence from her teammates, while she glanced over Crim and then Weiss, before settling on her again.

"I'm not going to hurt him you know," Blake whispered.
Arching an eyebrow at her, Arslan kept her voice low as she said, "He is my responsibility, regardless of age, I am simply keeping watch."

"So you expect me to believe you didn't notice?" Blake asked, twitching her ears under her hood.

"That we're kin?" she asked with a smoky chuckle.

Glowering Blake said, "Don't be coy."

Snorting, Arslan rolled her shoulders and said, "I heard your name, and your fighting style matches the reports I skimmed, when a bounty went up one week and down the next." Finally she turned to face Blake fully, her expression Grimm before she smirked. "I cannot begin to guess what absurd events brought the vanished Schnee heiress into the company of a former White Fang. I can only assume the circumstances were more ridiculous than such a partnership even sounds, but don't worry, I won't cause trouble. Nor should my team," she added.

"That's good to hear, I don't want to cause any trouble either," Blake said, the words and tone familiar to her, from overhearing negotiations between the White Fang and villagers who wanted no trouble but could cause it if they wished. "If it's a consolation, coming with us was Weiss's idea."

"Hm, I would imagine so, she seems too self-possessed to be here by anything but choice," Arslan hummed.

"What are you two whispering about back there?" Weiss asked.

"We were just wondering when you were going to stop flirting," Blake joked.

"Ah! Really Blake, can I not hold a polite conversation without you twisting it?" Weiss responded. She then glanced at Escuo and Ginger and said, "Besides, I'm sure you both having charming partners." Ginger laughed, it was weak but it was better than maudlin silence, as she said, "I'm not sure charming the word, but she is fun. My wife runs the tavern, not much wine these days, but still plenty of music and fish."

Blushing Escuo said, "Unmarried myself though..."

"If you don't take the plunge and ask Madeline out, I'll do it for you!" Ginger said, Escuo on the leg as she flew them over a particularly large log.

"Maybe ask Nadir for some tips," Arslan said, "According to a few students back home he's quite charming."

"What, no, I mean, I just..." Nadir stammered, now very distracted from contemplating being torn apart by Grimm.

Reese kicked flipped off her board and brought her knees up to her chest, letting the board flick around at a blurring speed below her before slamming her feet back down on its surface. Feeling and hearing the thrum of energy that ran through it, as Ruby quietly applauded her feat.

"That had to be at least thirty spins!" She said.
"I'll break my record at this rate," Reese said, grinning at the other Huntress.

"You know one thing I noticed in the fight though, Reese?" Ruby asked, her voice wavering a little uncertainly.

"It’s that I’m not crazy fast except in a straight line right?" Reese said, sighing as she shook her head.

"Yeah kinda," Ruby said.

"I know, I can spin, flip and olly my way around close quarters in a breeze, and terrains no thing, but even I can't keep up as much as I’d like without better boosters. Thing is, they could ruin the stability and control...” Reese said with a shake of her hooded head.

“Well I did have an idea on how to fix that,” Ruby said, eyes twinkling with mischief that only a younger sibling could hold.

“You thinking of using that Recoil idea?" She asked, an exited gasp slipping from her lips.

"Not just that," Ruby said, patting her Crescent Rose, "I was also thinking we could try adding my Semblance too!"

Their eyes met, and in unison they both said, "Just imagine how fast we co-

"NO!" Yang and Arslan barked.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again, as always thanks to Person With Many Aliases for beta reading and to everyone who has stuck with this story so far!

This was another chapter i initially had in two parts "First Impressions" for the fight and "Squishy Tensions" for the talking, but I opted to combine them, hopefully it worked out. As some may have noticed, I subscribe to the 'Arslan is a lion Faunus' head-canon, as to her trait, well, there's some hints but unless asked I won't be directly stating it within Pirate Signals. Also I have wanted to utilise the Yang/Arslan shock-wave punch since the moment I saw it, straight up my favourite moment in that fight.
Arslan hadn't known what to expect upon arriving at Shorelight, having never travelled this far south, even on her journey to Mistral. 'It looks weak though, just as they said,' she thought. The waterlogged houses, faint signs of disrepair and wary atmosphere, were all encompassing as they marched into town.

Arslan's gaze flicked between her team, Crim, her allies, and the villagers. 'I can't be careless again, far too much is at stake,' she thought. Her team, Crim, they were her responsibility. Arslan's bandaged hand clenched, her insides felt stiff with tension, her bindings stretched taught against her muscles.

"No one looks very happy," Ruby mumbled as she and Reese closed the distance between the rest of the group.

"That's hardly unexpected, we promised to fix the towers, I imagine they'll know we didn't succeed," Weiss said.

Taking in the wary townsfolk and listening for anything suspicious Arslan asked, "Do you want to handle explaining our presence to the Village Head?"

"Sure, that shouldn't be too hard," Yang said with a lazy wave of her hand.

"Maybe it'd be better if we did it," Escuo added.

As it turned out, 'better' was not the word Arslan would have used.

Yang's eyes were half lidded in veiled annoyance, as the Village Head sputtered and ranted as she marched about. Their eleven person party were scattered around the woman's surprisingly spacious, but very cluttered, circular hut. It was all dark wooden walls and floors that creaked, candles flickering in the wind that wafted through the house. Aged tables and stools holding small seashell sculptures and broken and aged momentous from swords to figurines.

Crim was being tended to on a nearby lounge, with some local medicine that would apparently help some. Escuo and Ginger were standing with her and Arslan, before the Village Head, who was in the centre of the room clutching her cane like she wanted to throttle it.

'I notice someone's on watch,' Yang muse as she looked around at how Arslan had scattered her team near windows and doors. 'Just like back at junior's...' Her brief bout of nostalgia was cut off as the Village Head went off again, this time in more obvious anger than shock.

"This was a ridiculous risk," she said, rising to her feet and hobbling in a mad uneven path around her living room. "Not only is the tower still down but you've brought back more people to drain our already stretched resources."

Yang heard a small snort, or maybe a growl rumble in Arslan's throat.

"Don't look at me like that girl," The elder rasped. Her eyes wide with a frantic intensity, it was like looking at someone coming down from a high Yang thought. "We can barely feed ourselves
and the pirates, now there's five more people, one of whom won't be able to move for a week. Did you expect a welcome mat, for us to rub your feet and welcome the glorious Huntresses who have already enraged the pirates!"

"I expected nothing," Arslan said tightly.

A ragged sigh escaping her lips the Village head shook her head and said, "At this point it will almost be a relief when the pirates come to collect the ship."

"You're still giving them our ship, after you tried to get us killed, what the f-," Yang snorted and said, "Frick?!"

"Better to give them what they want than risk the captain's ire," she said back with a sharp wave of her hand. "I expect all of you to be scarce for tomorrow afternoons pick up, if you need somewhere to rest you can come back once the transaction is done."

"So I should get the bike ready as well?" Ginger asked, shoulders healed, but slumped in obvious defeat.

Rubbing the bridge of her nose the Village head said, "Yes, at this point we should try and meet their expectations as best we can. Hopefully we can allay their suspicious should they have any."

"How many will come for the pick up?" Arslan asked, head tilted to the side, her words smooth and mild.

"Two usually," The Village Head answered, before her eyes shot to Arslan and she spat, "No. You are not permitted to risk our entire village on some fools attack on them. The captain would-"

Catching the olive eyes glance towards her Yang subtly nodded and interrupted, "Hey is the captain really likely to be there? I mean, this would be pretty standard by now right?" She said, palms out in a wide shrug.

"Yang is right, and if they send two ships that's only five, maybe fifteen people at most," Arslan said, feet sliding across the floor as she began to casually amble around the room. "The chances of any of their elites being present is relatively low and the eight of us should be able to handle regular crew members easily enough."

"Yeah, we just wait for them to land then bam!" Yang added, slamming her palm into her hand.

"And if they don't land, we can drag them down and tear them from their crafts," Arslan continued, looming over her downed pilot.

Just as the village Head looked to speak Arslan spun around and said, "We needn't attack the entire crew, just these vessels."

It was Weiss who spoke next, "Indeed, all we need is one ship, then-"

"We can haul ass to Mistral and get reinforcements!" Bolin cheered.

Snorting, well, huffing daintily, Yang was sure Weiss would say, she continued, "Yes, ABRN can," She rolled her eyes, "Haul it to Mistral." Weiss very obviously ignored the little "boo!" From Reese and Ruby as she continued. "While we, the Knights Errant, stay here and protect Shorelight from reprisal."

"If their ships are any good it shouldn't be a ridiculously long flight," Blake said. "Worst case
scenario, maybe twelve hours if they take a long path to avoid any dangerous run-ins, maybe another six for a few teams to be sent out and establish defences and patrols."

'Guess you learn all sorts of things about the Kingdom's responses to insurgents in the White Fang,' Yang thought.

"What a perfect plan, just like the one to repair the tower, and look what happened there!" The Village Head said, throwing her arms in the air, flaring her weather beaten robes. "This isn't the kingdoms, children; it's the wilds they will hardly be so fast for us! Should they even bother, Shorelight will have long been ground to dust before they get here."

"What's the alternative?" Arslan asked coolly. "Spend the rest of your lives bowing to a band of brigands, until you collapse under the weight of their demands? You're barely getting by as it is," Arslan said, punctuating her words with a single hard step towards the older woman.

Snorting, the Village Head said, "You're from in the kingdoms with that rosy outlook? No. You're a nomad, aren't you? Sleep together, eat together, live together and die together, isn't it?"

One hand across her chest, Arslan bowed and said, "Arslan Altan," she said with a sharp flick of her tongue, "Of the Northern Nomads."

Whatever passed between them after that was too swift for Yang to truly follow, save that the Village Head turned away from them. Marching to a cracked window she said, "Do whatever you will Huntresses, there's naught I can do to stop you. But," she added, "I will be telling the pirates that you forced this on us."

"I'd ask if you planned to call ahead and warn them, but that would reveal you'd been harbouring us," Arslan said, causing the elder to twitch.

"Just leave, I'm old and need my rest," She finally said.

"I need to ensure Crim's safety," Arslan countered.

"Then take him too, his treatment is done, and he should awaken by tomorrow," The Village Head said, slapping her cane against the floor.

"Very well, thank you for your assistance," Arslan finally said, clasping her hands as she bowed towards the woman.

"Yeah, sorry this is such a mess, but it should be fixed up really soon," Yang said with a wave and a chuckle, hoping to inject some levity into the situation.

"ABRN, you can stay with us in the warehouse; its dry and we can share supplies," Blake said as she and Weiss made their made her way to the door. Bolin and Arslan were picking up their pilot while Reese and Ruby drifted towards the door as well.

Clapping Escuo and Ginger on the back as she passed them, Yang whispered, "Sorry about all of that," as they shuffled out of the room. Marching over to Crim, Yang patted Bolin's shoulder and said, "Hey, I can do half the carrying, you go get Weiss's autograph or whatever." Bolin glanced at his leader, who nodded and the dark haired Huntsmen dashed after the rest of their teams.

Taking up the front of the stretcher and leaving her back to Arslan, Yang squatted down and with the same easy someone might apply to lifting a piece of cloth, lifted the stretcher up with Arslan taking the other end.
As they made their way out of the house, trailing behind their teams, who were seeing off Escuo and Ginger, Yang spoke. "So, think she's gonna back stab us?"

"Maybe, but unlikely, she's desperate and scared, but not stupid," Arslan said.

"Yeah, better to plead ignorance than try to explain why you were trying to screw them over I guess," Yang said. Rolling her head from side to side, Yang groaned as she felt the discs pop, and a small pulse of Aura rippled through her like a little breath of air in her lungs before it faded.

The streets were well dark at this time, to the point where Yang had to suck in a breath and let her Aura thread its way into her hair to provide some light. 'Night really doesn't make this place any less depressing,' she thought. The shadows were even more warped, the decay even more obvious, and the general feel of sludge and mud coated everywhere she looked.

"Not much of a talker are you?" Yang finally said.

Snorting Arslan said, "Apologies, but no. I can try, though."

"Oh~?" Yang asked, her lips forming a little 'O' as she glanced back at her fellow brawler. The smirk she received was borderline devilish as Arslan said, "Are you missing your weapons?"

"Oh, now that's mean!" Yang said, throwing her head back as if to lament her pain. Her bare wrists still felt too cold, the little twinge in her chest at her lost master work familiar at this point.

"I did not mean anything by it," Arslan added, almost hastily. "I merely noticed it when we were fighting. Some of your punches seemed oddly aimed, a slightly different bracing than one might expect, and the follow through was good but..."

"Compensating for something?" Yang chuckled.

"Just a bit," Arslan said. "Though," she said more lowly, her tone hinting at the barest level of throaty mirth. "You're easily one of the strongest close quarters fighters I've had the pleasure of meeting, in or outside the kingdoms."

"I could say the same for you," Yang laughed. "Don't suppose you're angling for a rematch are you? No one else will be around to keep it from getting fun after all, and we've got time," Yang said. Her words came out hot and almost breathy, the chance to go against someone who could really withstand what she could dish out... She was practically licking her lips at the thought.

"I just might be," Arslan said, "It would be good practise; as well as ideal for us to have a firm gauge of each other skills."

"So, tonight, after dinner?" Yang asked.

"Tomorrow morning, providing you've a good recovery rate," Arslan said. Yang was sure she could hear a faint teasing note to her words, and looking back she saw the barest sign of sharp teeth being bared in a smirk. "It wouldn't do to make too much noise so late, after all."

"Ah, you're cruel," Yang groaned. "But fair I guess, besides, I wouldn't want your team staying up after their bed time."

"Not would I," Arslan said without a hint of mirth.

That was almost enough for Yang to start scoffing, but she showed admirable restraint, she
"Indeed, we can work out a watch schedule over dinner," Arslan said, as they began ascending the slick stone path that led to the warehouse.

"No leaving Ruby and Reese together, though," Yang said quickly. 'It’s nice Ruby's getting along with her, but I don’t want to know what they’d do if left alone for three hours,' Yang thought. She could just imagine them trying to slingshot themselves to the moon or at a particularly large Grimm.

Arslan, it seemed, was of the same mind as she nodded firmly and said, "Agreed, leaving them unattended could be risky."

"Ah well," Yang said, "We’ll figure out the specifics later; I hope you like fish, assuming Zwei hasn't eaten them all, we should still have some left from when Ruby caught them."

"Zwei?" Arslan asked.

"Our dog!" Yang cheered as a happy yip echoed across the coast and Ruby squealed, dashing towards the corgi.

"Lovely..." Arslan muttered.

The warehouse where Stardust had been temporarily entombed was as lively as Blake had ever seen it. On one side of the cooking dish Yang, Weiss and Ruby sat with Reese and Bolin. Most of them were excitedly exchanging stories and anecdotes, or were being encouraged to do so by Yang. While, Weiss tried to maintain some sense of restraint to the ever increasing roster of antics the rest were willing to talk up.

'And of course, the dog,' Blake thought grimly. Zwei was currently curled up on Weiss's lap, wagging his little tail and stubby paws in the air as she gave over half her meal to his greedy chops.

It wasn't that she hated Zwei, really it wasn't. Blake would just rather that Zwei never occupy space or time anywhere remotely near herself. 'Though it seems I'm not alone on that tonight, at least,' Blake thought, glancing to her right as she swallowed another bite of cooked fish, not quite as good as fresh but still tasty.

On her right, Arslan sat with her legs crossed and an empty plate in her lap. Nadir, who'd just prodded at his food until she'd nudged him into eating, had quickly wavered and collapsed once his meal was done. Now the pink haired gunner was slumped on her shoulder snoring lightly, a fact Arslan seemed quite inured to.

Not great conversationalists, but at least she could respect their taste in company.

It wasn't long though, before Ruby and Bolin started yawning, quickly followed by Weiss and Reese. With a mutual clap of their hands Yang and Arslan decreed it was time for bed, followed by Ruby declaring "Pile on Yang!" much to ABRN's confusion.

Blake volunteered herself for first watch, if only because she was hoping to sleep in and there were few things she loathed more than being awoken mid-sleep to watch over everyone then try and return to rest. It was not a surprise that Arslan volunteered for the same watch.

"But how are we gonna keep warm without you?" Reese groaned, as she nuzzled into her sleeping bag.
"You'll have to manage," Arslan answered, almost apologetically.

"Join us with Yang, Reese, she's super warm!" Ruby said, already under a blanket and situated on Yang's lap.

Grinning, Reese was quick to join her, a half asleep Nadir being dragged along with her.

"Uh," bolin stammered awkwardly, looking at the growing pile of bodies around Yang and possibly feeling left out, as Weiss dropped down into her usual spot and Yang's hair flared gold.

With a lazy wave Yang said, "If you're chilly, come join us. Just mind your hands and my hair, kid." she added a little wink. With that, Bolin quickly slid up to his teammates. All together the six of them were in some form on Yang, or pressed up on the cement wall and floor near her, that radiated the kind of warmth that only came from long exposure to the sun, or Yang Xiao Long.

Taking up opposite side of the warehouse, well away from the dozing teams, Blake kept her eyes focused squarely out the window. Except for those brief moments were darkness piercing amber eyes drifted through the blackened warehouse. Eventually they'd fall on a similarly glinting set of olive eyes and slowly they'd return to their windows, as a light drizzle pattering against the windows.

It was a very quiet watch.

"Mmgmff," Bolin grunted. Everything was black, his eyes felt stuck together, twitching and shaking as he shifted in place. Something rough was rubbing on his cheek, and he was still drifting in that wonderful place between waking and sleep.

A rough cough hit his ears and Nadir gasped himself awake, blinking frantically as he shot up, trying to remember where and who he was. Like water from a shower head, context for the rough cement warehouse washed over his mind. He could feel Reese and Bolin trying to get more comfortable, grumbling and groaning as they twitched closer to the ball of heat that was Yang Xiao Long.

"Sorry for waking you," whispered Arslan in her usual rough voice.

Turning to look at his leader, he found her seated at Crim's head, the man was looking up at the world with wavering eyes, as she kept her hand on his forehead.

"Its fine," Nadir said, licking his lips as he crawled towards the two and came to sit as Crim's side. The man was bundled up in more blankets than he thought they had, even still he could see the pilot's chest rising and falling. "Need anything?" Nadir asked, as he spied the man's dry and cracked lips.

"Water," he rasped.

"Thank you, Nadir," Arslan said, slipping wood carved bottle from her pocket and passing it to him before lifting Crim's head up.

Uncorking the lid, Nadir shook off his own dry throat, and placed the smooth rim to Crim's lips and began to slowly tilt, until he felt water ripple at the edges and saw the older man slowly sucking it down.

"Your temperature's back to normal, allegedly you should take another day for sleep and recovery," Arslan said formally.
"Isn't that a bit fast?" Nadir asked, even as Crim shook his head, leading to him taking the water back as Crim licked his lips.

"Aura is an excellent multiplier for healing, once it's focused," Arslan reminded him, as she lowered Crim's head back to his pillow.

'Has she even slept yet?' Nadir asked himself. He hoped she had at least, glancing at her ruffled robe he guessed that was the case, though as expected she'd kept herself to watching over their injured party member. 'I almost forgot he was here,' Nadir thought shamefully. Out loud he said, "Want me to check the bandages?"

"Where are we?" Crim asked, his voice still worn, but no longer sound quite like he'd barf up a lung in the next moment.

"A warehouse in Shorleight, and yes, Nadir, please check them," Arslan said.

"Situation?" Crim asked, as Nadir slid down the blankets and sighed in relief to see the man's bandages were still clean, if looser than they should be.

"Ship's destroyed. Pirates." Arslan said, "We found other Hunters and are taking refuge in Shorelight," she repeated. "Do you know the town?"

While they talked, Nadir gently grasped Crim's left arm and lifted it up, then to the side. 'Phew, he can still move it,' Nadir thought, grinning as he felt the pilot twitch and flex his tired muscles. Moving on to the next one he listened as the two continued to talk.

"Fishing village," Crim said. "I swung by here once or twice, old, bypassed for the usual trade routes 'cause of Vytal's mountains." He staggered for a moment, wincing as Nadir whispered a 'sorry!' as he pulled the pilots right arm to the side. Sucking in a deep breath he asked, "My situation?"

Nadir quickly set about unclasping the bindings on the man's bandages and refastening them, one hand near the wound and waiting for the moment of tension that said he was just tight enough.

"You'll live, a glass shard hit your side and your surprise let it slip by your Aura, then the swamp water infected the wound... I'm sorry," Arslan ground out, refusing to take her eyes off Crim's wound as Nadir finally fastened it up tight.

'This is the part where you say she did all she could,' a little voice reminded Nadir. "A-" he started, before Crim practically spat only to wince at the motion.

Letting out a disgruntled moan he said, "Don't mind it, had worse, should have seen the Grimm coming. Fuckers never waste a chance."

"Swear," Arslan automatically corrected, eyes widening she looked between the two of them, before Crim let out a quiet huff of amusement and Nadir snickered.

"Children," Arslan muttered with a roll of her eyes.

"Can you eat, sir?" Nadir asked.

"I could, but," he said haltingly, a little break being sucked in with each word before he yawned, eyes squinting from the obvious tension in his chest. "I'm tired," he finally said.

"Get some sleep then, we can ready some emergency rations for you later," Arslan said.
"Good kids," Crim said, the words trailing off before he drifted off and Nadir pulled the man's blankets back up.

"Thank you Nadir," Arslan said quietly, eyes trailing across Crim, him, their team and then the 'Knights Errant'.

"Hey, at least I can help a little, hehe," Nadir said running a hand through his fraying ponytail.

Scowling Arslan patting his arm and said, "You acquitted yourself ably yesterday, do not think otherwise."

Letting out a shuddering sigh than ran from his cold chest to his shoulder, Nadir spoke, "Thanks, I mean, I- I don't know. I was freaked out for most of it, and without Reese there I swear I'd have frozen up, it’s... weird fighting people." That was the story of his life, barely overcome the trials of an academy, freak out when fighting Grimm. Finally learn to pull together when fighting Grimm... and turn into a paranoid mess the moment people were involved. Why had he wanted to be a Huntsmen again?

"Stop that," Arslan said, tapping his arm just a bit harder to draw him back. "Too long in your own head and you'll get lost."

"Hah, right," Nadir said, trying not to meet her eyes but suddenly finding that very difficult. A cloud must have gone over the still rising sun because the warehouse dimmed, and suddenly Arslan's freaky eyes were the brightest thing around.

"I am here to listen if you need to talk," Arslan said. There was a moment of silence before she continued, "However, whatever fears you might have had you fought. So long as you act, Nadir, you've no reason to feel guilt or shame, more Hunters could benefit from considering their, and others action..."

"Um, thanks," he said. Honestly, every time he and Arslan spoke in-depth it felt like she was conversing with him on two different levels, neither of which he really got. 'Why does social stuff hard to be hard?'

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah, fine, I think, just kind of out of it, still," Nadir could sense the frown she was sending at him, even through the darkness. "Look, if I can put it into words you'll be the first person I come to, just, you know, trying to think and not get..." he tried to cover his mouth and stifle the yawn and failed miserably.

"Get some sleep, we've all earned our rest," Arslan said.

Glancing at her as he crawled back to his spot, "What about you?"

Hey eyes dipped hinting, at the unmistakable look of a smirk hidden in the dark as she said, "I've slept some, and the... dog, is on watch, we'll be fine."

"If you say so," Nadir mumbled half draping himself on his team mates as he drifted back to sleep, or tried to anyway. The pumping of his blood and the memories of yesterday’s fight refusing to leave him be as his mind raced until he wanted to slap himself. 'I can fight fine, but the moment there's a break and my stupid brain starts working I can't pull it together!'

Then, a deep rumbling sound emanated from Arslan, which quickly smoothed out into something like a hummed melody or a tune.
Focusing on only that sound, the droplets of rain on the windows keeping his eyes occupied, Nadir found sleep's welcome embrace.

Chapter End Notes

Hello once again to anyone who's been reading this story, thanks for keeping up with it, as always I hope you've found it a fun ride. My thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases for editing and to everyone who has commented, liked and followed, its been incredibly encouraging. Additional thanks to Always late to the part for suggesting I use word to edit these from now on, its great for catching minor errors I miss so hopefully that has made the job easier on both editor and reader alike :D

This was actually the chapter where Nadir really came into his own as a character for me, I hadn't originally planned this scene but once I started writing it I couldn't stop. Also, I really ummed and aahed about whether to fuse this chapter and the next one, but due to sickness and not being 100% sure it would flow as well from one scene to the next over one chapter to the next, I opted to leave it here.
A happy little groan vibrated from Ruby's throat, as she slipped from the tangled mess of bodies on the wall and smelt the air. "Cooking already?" She asked, pressing down hard as she tried to rub the sleep from her eyes and drive off the blurriness.

"Yep, we still had some fish and Blake managed to scrounge up some potatoes no one will miss either," Yang said.

Looking around quickly Ruby spied Yang squatting next to Stardust and looking over their black cooking dish. Several misshapen, foil-wrapped orbs sat at the heated base of the cooking instrument, that Ruby could only guess where the baked potatoes. Similarly, there was fish laid out on the top of the dish as it slowly rose up into a sizzle.

"What time is it?" Ruby asked as she stumbled over to Yang, slowly finding her feet only to give up on the concept as she dropped to the floor with an 'oof!'

"About six I think," Yang said, "Blake ambled off about half an hour ago, said she'd be back by lunch time though."

"Think she's gonna check out Shorelight again?" Ruby asked. Ruby could sympathise with Blake, being more than a little paranoid, she always was when it came to towns and Shorelight hadn't done much to earn her trust.

"That or fishing, you sleep all right?" Yang asked, prodding the fish with a metal spatula, the hissing, bubbling sounds of frying meat filling the air and drawing groans from those who still slept.

"Not bad," Ruby said, looking down upon breakfast and licking her lips. Ruby ignored the taste of sleep breath in her mouth and said, "Smells great. Though... is this really enough for everyone?"

Yang stalled, her wide smile falling open for a moment and her body stiffening to the point where Ruby could almost imagine a metallic whine or a marionette's strings getting tied. Then she chuckled and sent her a wink, "Actually it is. See Blake said she'd handle herself, I did offer but nope, apparently my cooking's not good enough for her," Yang said in mock offence. "Besides that, Zwei and I went nuts on some rations, and apparently so did Arslan and their pilot, so it's just the rest of you snoring birds."

"Yang, we're meant to be saving those," Ruby huffed.

"Sorry, but I didn't want to wake ya's with lots of clanking," Yang said. In a swift motion she pulled away from the cooking plate and whipped out a battered thermos, mixing Ruby a steaming hot chocolate. Sending her a soft grin, head tilted so her hair fell just right to make her look especially young and bashful, her older sister said, "Forgive me?" and passed her the mug.

"Hmm, maybe?" Ruby snickered as she slurped down her piping hot chocolate.

"Actually, I meant because I'm leaving you, Zwei and Weiss in charge of our guests and breakfast," Yang said quickly.
"What!" Ruby asked.

Waving her off Yang rose to her feet and said, "Relax, the spices are done. Just keep them cooking until they crisp up nicely and flip. I promise I'll be back for lunch and our planning session."

"But where are you going?" Ruby asked as she scooched closer to their meal and picked up the spatula. Urg, she really hated cooking, 'Give me some piping hot steel or Dust chemicals and we're talking,' Ruby thought, squinting at the spatula.

Rolling her shoulders, Yang brought her hands together and cracked her knuckles with an almost grunt of excitement. "Let's just say I've got a meeting planned, anyway catch-ya later, and don't do anything I wouldn't do!" She said, before dashing out of the warehouse.

"As if I would!" Ruby shouted back, sticking out her tongue at her sister, as Yang back flipped the moment she passed the door and disappeared.

Blowing her growing fringe from her forehead, Ruby glanced at the remains of their growing party. Everyone was stirring just a bit, but only in that 'I'm rolling over trying to sleep more' way she knew all too well from cold winter mornings. A low hum emanating from her mouth as Zwei waddled up and flopped down at her side, while Ruby took in all the shiny metal implements around her.

'I could wake them up like that,' she thought, the loud clanging already ringing in her head as she snorted up her drink. The idea left her almost as fast as it came though. Fun was fun, but this was hardly the day to be making fun. 'Even if Weiss's face would be hilarious,' she thought.

Rising to her feet, Ruby said, "Keep an eye on the food Zwei, and no eating," she added, much to his ear drooping chagrin.

In a few quick strides, she was down at her sleeping fellow's side and prodding Weiss's cheek. Her friend, at some point after losing her preferred pillow in Yang, had yanked her entire quilt upwards and then slipped it haphazardly under her head, arms buried in the tangled mess. "Mm- Mmm!" Weiss moaned as she scowled in Ruby's vague direction with half lidded blue eyes and a tiny scowl. "What?"

"Breakfast's almost ready!" Ruby said cheerily, "Come on, up, up, up, guys, today we show some pirates what-for!" That she'd started clapping her hands and marching in place only occurred to Ruby, when Bolin moaned in despair and pulled Nadir's arm over his head to try and drown out the noise.

"Dude, gimme my arm back," Nadir tugged weakly, as he tried to push himself up, half dragging his taller team mate with him.

"Take me to the food..." Bolin groaned in response.

Weiss, seemingly remembering they had company, lurched up like she'd found a Grimm gnawing on her toe and started trying, hopelessly, to tidy her hair. "Where's my comb, where's my-"

"In the bag," Ruby said, pointing with her thumb, only for Weiss to blur passed her.

Looking to Reese's dark blue sleeping bag, Ruby prodded the still sleeping girl who'd, since last night, buried herself in the oversized bag. 'Looks cosy,' Ruby thought. Grasping, what she guessed, was Reese's shoulder, Ruby gave her a shake and said, "Reese, come on, breakfast is ready!"
What met her was a guttural snarl as the green haired girl yanked down her sleeping bag and looked out through messy hair and half open eyes. She sniffed the air once and slipped back into her bag with a gurgling moan.

"Not a morning person huh?" Ruby asked, chuckling even as she tapped her booted foot against the squirming sleeping bag. "Come on, I got hot chocolate."

There was something like a snort and Reese sat up on her sleeping bag. Then, slowly, she started to rise to her feet without so much as dropping the hood. This lasted all of two second before she fell with a squeak, and began dragging herself along the floor. "The chocolate's mine Bolin!"

"I don't see your name on it!"

As they began to squabble, Weiss seemingly content to fuss over herself and Nadir too sleepy to do anything but watch his team, Ruby wondered, 'Is this what breakfast is normally like for Yang?'

"Hey, is something burning?" Weiss asked.

"Ah!" Ruby shouted, before charging in to save breakfast.

Arslan stood atop the warehouse and faced the sun, her Aura wavered as she looked at the blinding light, a faint pounding ache still hitting her. The cement scraped beneath her smooth shoes and the wind ruffled her hair and robes. The twin sets of beads around her neck stayed silent even as she breathed deep, feeling her lungs swell until they pressed against her chest.

'Master the body.'

Arslan unclasped her hands, rolled her shoulders and felt the familiar stretch and crack of her bones in motion as she flexed. With a swift, sharp motion she slid one leg out, braced the other and flicked her palm forward. The air cracked against her flesh.

'Master your soul.'

Limbs snapping back, Arslan let her Aura flow. The roiling, writhing energy ran through her frame and she tensed, mind, body, and soul. She let it swell up with each breath and then flow from her; the energy drifted into the air and the floor, warm, thick and pulsing with a size and weight, greater than the faint golden light revealed.

'Control is key.'

The energy coiled and twisted, pressed against her skin and weaved through her form. Muscles swelled, bones hardened, veins and nerves pulsed with power. Knees bent, she shot forward, palms out, a strike smacked against the air, silently this time.

'Ferocity and thought must be one.'

Hands unclasped into claws, her fingers twitched as she dragged down and across, cutting through the air, a trail of light and heat marking her path. Legs came next, sharp kicks, wide and flowing through the air, weaving between her old strikes and stilling the air.

'Power and technique. Ferocity and control.'

Her Aura pulsed, her heart swelled and her strikes flew faster, swifter. She wove a path across her battlefield, a blocked blow was turned back, a kick turned into a gentle sweep and-
'Strike with everything, and leave nothing.'

She struck with two fists. The flowing air was torn asunder, the quiet was subsumed in a roar, and for one brief moment her Aura burst from her hands in a single magnified blast.

'Battle is my home.'

Arslan did not jolt when she heard a high keening whistle. Bending her head back she looked towards Yang, who was hanging from the warehouse roofs side with one hand, the other on her lips. Laughing, the fighter pulled herself up with nary a gasp and said, "That looked nice. I hope you're saving some for me though."

"Don't fret, I was just preparing myself for you," Arslan said. Her mind was abuzz, her heart thumping and her blood flowed like mad, as she felt the heat of Yang's Aura. It radiated off of her like a fire, so different to her tightly bound soul, but so strong.

"So, here?" Yang said, waving her arms.

"No, up there," Arslan said, pointing high at the forest topped cliff that rose above them and she said, "So we don't break anything." Her spine flexed and the nerves at the small of her back tingled, seeking something long absent, as she felt her Aura uncoil, claws drawn and ready to hunt.

"Sounds fun," Yang growled, a wide smile on her lips.

And like that they both bound towards the flat surface, bounding from the roof they flung themselves up the horizontal rock face and into the woods.

The gentle ruffling of leaves, and the soft drips of water running through the gnarled and overgrown forest were disrupted by a 'fwoosh!'

Yang ducked and weaved her way around Arslan's speedy open strikes, trying to lash out with her own mighty upper cuts. Each blow that slipped passed the other was accompanied by a rush of burning air and a growl. The ground behind her foe was slanted upwards though and Yang grinned as Arslan's pace slowed, by only the smallest of margins.

Heaving her arm back, Yang launched her strike. Arslan's grunt of surprise was accompanied by her bringing up an arm to block. The shock of the strike sent her reeling, torn from the ground she flew and Yang launched herself after the woman. Just as Yang got close though, Arslan flipped backwards, feet barely brushed by her, as Yang threw herself back, but it wasn't enough.

A rope dart unfurled and wrapped around her ankle and Yang was flung through the air, the wind screeching around her like she was atop a Bullhead as she was dragged up to meet Arslan. Crossing her arms, she met Arslan's kick. Grunting and spitting at the force of her foes blow, she felt like it was slamming against her chest even as she flew through the trees.

Blurring backwards, Arslan hopped onto a mound and back-flipped over a tree as Yang's roar tore through the forest. A boulder, at least twice her size, came crashing down like as missile against the soft earth, glowing a hot red and burying itself deep, as it tore up the ground.

Not missing a moment Yang tore from a thick line of bushes leaving smoke in her wake as she lunged into the air. Eager to meet the fighter Arslan grinned and with Aura flowing steps flickered between several tree stumps and the ground as she gained momentum before launching herself at Yang.
Colliding with a mighty crash, both fighters lashed out to try and slam the other down, only for their hands to meet with an air ripping shock wave. The golden-red blast threw back their hair and sent the trees contorting away from the force of their blows.

As their feet met the ground, neither broke away, Arslan just barely had the high ground but Yang was taller still. Growling they drove themselves forward, arms shaking under each other’s strength as the water began to hiss, bubble and steam.

Their eyes met, the growing smirks on their dirtied and bloodied features, clear.

"Giving up?" Yang grunted.

Arslan snorted and flung her head forward, slamming it against Yang's just as the taller blonde pushed her back. A sharp crack rang out through the woods as Yang’s head was thrown back.

Yang clenched Arslan's hands tighter, their nails dug into each other’s Aura, pressing down on skin and bone in a bid to break through by sheer force. Muscles stretched as bones popped and cracked. Something like a cackle escaped her lips as she threw herself forward, this time meeting Arslan's next head-butt with her own.

Blake kept to the shadows, easier said than done with the houses as spread out as they were, but she hadn't been an infiltration expert for nothing. Her ears flickered and twitched at even the faintest sound, from the creaking of the wood to the soft shuffle of feet.

'No strange movement, nothing out of the ordinary,' she thought, a tight frown on her face. Blake was currently hiding inside one boxy looking house's out-hanging rafters. A little rippling wave of Aura washed over and into the decaying wood to keep it strong under her weight.

Maybe she was being paranoid: paranoid she'd be found out and reported, paranoid the townsfolk would sell them out to the pirates, paranoid they'd do something foolish. 'But so far they're just quiet, and scared,' Blake mused, the faint roiling mass of kindled anger pressing against her chest swelling. She'd been scouting all morning, only stopping to eat some fresh fish she traded with the fisher for on her first day in the town.

'But lunch is getting close an-

That was when it hit, her ears shot up and Blake's entire body stiffened and she pressed herself against the wooden frame in a bid to disappear. The sky above Shorelight lit up, in gold and red, as a furious roar tore into the air accompanied by a blast of wooden shrapnel and dirt.

"Ugh," Blake said, as she looked to the blast zone, even her eyes straining to pick out any details. 'That was the biggest one yet,' she thought.

'They're they go again,' Weiss thought, as the calamitous boom rang out from up above. Her only peace came from the fact it was not followed by the usual string of lesser blasts and crashes. 'Maybe they’re done?' She hoped, stepping out onto the loosely defined ‘porch’ of their warehouse to relish the suns warm rays and the crash of the oceans waters down below.

Then there was another bang, followed by Yang's uproarious laughter ringing in the air. Weiss merely groaned and turned back to watching Bolin fanning the flames of a small fire as he boiled some water. 'Wait, where's Ruby!?'
Spinning around, she saw her friend atop Reese's hover-board swerving around the rocky coast like an obstacle part while Reese was spinning Crescent Rose wildly in the air and-

'They wouldn't!' she thought as Ruby swerved towards Reese and, 'They would!' 

Reese leapt into the air, towards Ruby and the hover-board-

'I can't watch!' Weiss thought, covering her ears for the inevitable explosion of noise that would ensue, regardless of the success of their gambit.

Dirt and grit clung to her like a second skin. Faint trickles of dried blood and sweat clung to her frame. Yang still had some energy left, but somehow still felt an ache with every laboured breath and her Aura was quelled deep within her, like the coals of a fire that had burnt itself out. Suffice to say, she felt amazing, and looking at her sparring partner's satisfied smirk, she knew Arlsan felt the same.

"Ah!" Yang gasped as she pulled the water bottle from her mouth, the warm waters rushing down her parched throat. With an almost lazy toss, Yang sent the bottle back to Arslan, sitting in a high tree branch, who snatched it out of the air and gulped down another sip.

Letting out a content sigh, Yang let herself lean back against a thick ridged tree trunk. The grass grew up around her, while the roots and stones bumped up against her back. Somehow though, she couldn't care less, as she lay dangling her legs over the edge of their crater, one so deep they hadn't even been able see over the rim after their brawl had stopped, and turned unto a grappling match. The packed earth was cooked together by the intense force of their battle into something as hard as cement.

Patting her muscled tummy like she'd just enjoyed a big meal Yang sighed, almost willing to drift off into sleep. However a few lingering thoughts niggled at her brain and there was a low key energy tingling at her insides.

"So, was it good for you?" She asked, a little smirk and a wink accompanying her words.

Something rumbled in Arslan's throat before she blinked and finally answered, "It was, though I think you held back some, warrior."

Snorting Yang said, "Yeah and so were you, no Semblance, at your level? I call bullshit."

"I skirted the edges, apologies for not going further but," She froze for a moment as a snarling Beowolf burst into the air behind her. "Quiet," she bit out. Grabbing its head and flinging it upside down before, Arslan wrapped her arms around its neck and-

a snap rang out and its body went limp and she tossed its body into their crater. "I am sorry for that, my Semblance is not something I care to use outside of specific circumstances."

"A oneshoter then?" Yang asked, arching her eyebrow, ears tingling as she heard weaving through the grass behind her. A hand shot through the air as the King Taijitu bared its fangs, the Grimm was barely her own size, and Yang slammed it into her knee and tossed it into the crater before turning back to Arslan. "I'd say that feels odd for you, but then again, those charged strikes aren't
"nothing to sneeze at."

"Why thank you, your resilience is superb, rare is it to fight someone who can let it become a slug fest with me," Arslan said, deep voice rough with amusement.

"Same, was nice," Yang sighed, as she pressed herself deeper into the ground and snatched the water bottle from the air as it soared towards her with a slosh of water.

Tipping the bottle over her open mouth, Yang gurgled down the last dregs of water and sighed. "So, much as I hate to ruin a good fight, I gotta ask. Do you guys have any plans for Blake and Weiss?"

Half lidded eyes stared back at Yang's own, before Arslan finally shrugged. "The others barely remembered Belladonna, save saying something thoughtless about her heritage, you've little to fear from them. Even back in the kingdoms no one much cares; well, save maybe Vale."

Tilting her head to the side Yang said, "Oh?"

"Dust robberies, White Fang allegedly, but given the SDC is apparently being difficult, so it could just be black marketeers stepping up their game," Arslan said disinterestedly.

"Kinda glad I left when I did, that sounds like something the police would love to throw at me," Yang said, noticing her sparring partners bemused, she guessed it was bemused, look Yang elaborated. "I didn't have a perfect track record with them, fighting spilling onto the streets, and the like."

Nodding Arslan said, "Ah, fair enough, city dwellers are so sensitive about that sort of thing, towns and wanderers too but, because of the Grim. Really, only Academies give one the chance to fight all out, and even then it is always with watchers."

"Academies and desperate measures," Yang added, recalling her recent encounter in Morius, if that could be called a fight anyway.

"Point," Asrslan said, accompanied by a wave. "As to Weiss," she continued, "she's been declared a missing person, and there's a reward on her head for a safe return. However," she shrugged, "I've no fondness for the SDC, and much for the rest of you, so it’s an easy decision to make. The others will follow my lead, and I can make sure they keep it secret."

"Thanks, I just wanna make sure nothing bad comes their way, they've been through a lot," Yang said.

"I understand," Arslan said, and with the weight to her words Yang guessed she did, it reminded her of how she talked about Ruby.

"So, guess we should head back, or do ya wanna grapple and head-butt me some more?" Yang said, flexing her fingers until she heard a satisfying pop.

"Head back," Arslan said with a sigh, "get their lunches ready, plan-

"Smash pirates and head home, I get-cha, we'll have to do this again though," Yang said, throwing her legs up and then flinging herself forward by slamming them down.

"Oh indeed."
"You guys..." Yang said slowly.

"Made your own lunch?" Arslan finished, seemingly just as baffled.

"It was a team effort!" Ruby shouted happily from her seat on a particularly large stone on the shoreline.

"Don't talk with a potato in your mouth dolt!" Weiss snapped.

"Does that mean we can talk with other stuff in our mouths," Reese said, squishing her cheeks as Ruby cackled.

"Gross," Weiss and Nadir muttered.

"Are you two gonna join us, or did you tire yourselves out?" Blake asked, with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Tsk, tired? Please, we barely got started, still I could eat," Yang said, tromping over to the aligned Hunters on the coast, Arslan at her side.

"So once we're done, we start planning right?" Bolin asked from where he lay down on his back, seemingly indifferent to the stone surface.

"Yes," Arslan said, squatting down at her teams’ side and snatching up a roasted fish.

"Those pirates aren't gonna know what hit 'em," Ruby swore, a smile on her lips and light in her eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Notes:
Things will get more plot related next chapter, I promise :) As always thanks to Person With Many Aliases for beta reading and to everyone who has liked, followed, faved and commented!

Blake is mostly scouting around town because her general sense of paranoia has been hyped up due to her still technically being a wanted criminal and the situation in general, as well as based a bit of her canon habit of lone wolfing it when something is bothering her. Arslan's self training scene is actually based on one from Vejiitasei Ascendant a DBZ fic I quite enjoy, however I'm unsure as to how well I translated the general ideas into this piece.

On Yang and Arslan's sparring match, I'm taking some cues from the game in how Aura regenerates, and acting on the assumption that if no one is seriously injured an hour or two's rest and a meal will get those involved back to 100% so they taking any particularly large gamble when it comes to this match and both have ways of compensating if they don't enter a fight at the top of their game anyway. Heck, Yang is probably one of the only people someone would want to fight less, after she's taken a few hits XD

I planned on waiting on this chapter, however the new volume deadline is drawing
near and I want as much as out as possible before then, while still taking time for editing, so I hope faster updates are cool with everyone!
Within the dark recesses of the warehouse, Yang leaned against the wall of the tiny faux office, with Arslan looming near the door.

Holding her Scroll up to her lips, she clacked her teeth together and said, "Ksh breaker, breaker, this is Team Strong reporting in. All is quiet here on the western front, what's your status?"

Blake arched an eyebrow at her Scroll from where she, Weiss and Nadir concealed themselves behind Ginger’s workshop, near the entrance of Shorelight. "What are you even referencing?" She finally asked.

Only for Ruby's voice to pipe in, "Ksh, this is Team Swift, good to hear Team Strong, we got the far south covered."

Just as it looked like Weiss was about to take her Scroll and snap it over her knee, demanding the sisters make sense, Blake answered them. "Ksh, this is team-"

"Brains as it were," Weiss said huffily.

"Reporting in," Blake continued, "All is quiet on the North side."

Snickering along with her temporary teammates Reese and Bolin, Ruby threw her Scroll back to Reese. Whipping up Crescent Rose, she rested it atop the boulder she'd taken cover behind and scanned the wetlands and dense woods again. Moving in a long, slow trail, she frowned as she was met with nothing more than bare blue sky-

"I see something," She said.

"We got movement, and it’s not just a bird this time," Reese said, her previous chipper tone moderated by something crisper, but still tinged with excitement.

Pulling free from a grove of densely packed trees with a trail of leaves and bark, a Bullhead rose into the sky.

"They're being careful, they either arrived last night or kept low, risky with Grimm, but doable in a Bullhead," Blake's voice cut in.

"They're making a beeline for Shorelight, should-" Ruby said, when the engines suddenly flared, "Be there in a few secs!" She grit her teeth in annoyance as the Bullhead swung into town with a deliberate casualness, almost swaggering. The jets blew away everything, wood panels, little figures, water and mud went everywhere and-

"Why the centre of town?" Blake spat, even as the sound of feet clapping against water and wooden paths ran out through the Scroll.
"Dammit, I thought they’d go for the warehouse, we'll be there!" Yang called in.

Yanking back Crescent Rose, Ruby heaved it behind her and let the metal shift, clank and hiss as it unfolded to its full glory.

"Guys hop on the blade," she ordered.

Unexpectedly Reese flicked up her board and came to hover against Crescent Rose. Only the faintest dispersion of air whispering against Ruby's aura infused weapon told her Reese's board was even there.

"This'll be good," Bolin said with some mix of genuine enthusiasm and wariness as he joined Reese and lightened the board, Reese and himself.

Allies loaded, Ruby pulsed her Aura, a stream of rose petals spilling from her cloak and pulled the trigger, catapulting her teammates into the air.

'That was just as cool as I imagined,' she thought as they were sent hurtling into the sky.

Why the pirates weren't just going for the warehouse, Weiss couldn't guess. Blake muttering a curse as she took off was enough to get her moving though. Conjuring Glyphs beneath her feet to keep up with the afterimage leaving Faunus, Weiss sent herself and Nadir towards the town centre.

"Oh seriously!?!" Nadir shouted from behind her.

Eyes tilting skyward, Weiss was surprised to see Bolin and Reese hurtling through the air. 'They were paired with Ruby. Why am I surprised by this?' She wondered.

Blake leapt atop the Village Heads house as the Bullhead's doors swung up. However it seemed the pilot was thinking better of it as the jets were swinging upwards to escape.

"I think not!" Weiss said, hands flying out and two bright blue Glyphs surrounded the engines which began stuttering and grunting. She tightened her hold, it felt like tensing her stomach so much it stung, but the ship stayed in place.

"Fire!" Someone within shouted, and five barely men and women, with bandannas over their mouths, pulled out their guns.

'Why is Blake waiting!??' Weiss thought, as even Nadir readied to fire, while Blake just stood on the roof watching the ship pull against her Glyphs as the pirates readied their weapons an-

"Woohoo!" Reese whooped. Board angled flat, she flew straight into the ships deck and slammed her hover-board against their backs. She did some kind of spinning kick and in a blast of emerald green and red, sent them all flying out the ship, as she went after them.

Bolin flung himself from her board and clanged against the top of the ship, slamming his staff into the roof. The metal groaned and Weiss felt her strain to fight the engines lessen as the ship's weight increased.

Blake mostly ignored the pirates, only using one as stepping stone as she jumped off his back and into the ship.
The pirates’ landed with a chorus of shouts and curses, one of them shouting to rally and fire, but Weiss just smirked.

"What the fuck is going on!?!" roared the ship's pilot, slamming his fists toward the throttle, again and-

A snap rang out and a black blur wrapped up his wrist. Before he could even blink he was pulled from his seat and introduced to a boot by way of his face.

As he went slack, Blake let her bindings drop, shooting to the controls she flicked off the throttle, opened the landing gears and even turned on the signal lights as she guided the ship down.

Ruby arrived to a fight practically over. The Bullhead was landing, Weiss had two pirates restrained by Glyphs and shouting insult or pleading for mercy respectively. Nadir and Reese broke through their own opponent's guard in a few seconds and also had them down.

Spying one fellow who'd slipped away and was making a beeline for a house, sword at the ready, Ruby lazily brought Crescent Rose up and fired. With a crack, the bullet slammed into his side and sent the pirate bouncing along the street with several thuds before landing at the newly arrived Yang and Arslan's feet.

'Well that was easy,' Ruby thought, watching as Yang scooped up the dazed pirated by the scruff of his shirt and they all converged at the landed ship.

"I have the pilot," Blake said, disinterestedly shoving the unconscious, limp figure to the ground as she hopped out of the Bullhead.

"Awesome, I'd say you guys hogged all the fun but this, hah, didn't even look like a challenge," Yang said, dropping her own burden to the ground.

"Please, please let me go, I didn't wanna do it, they made me!" A young man screamed from within Weiss's Glyph.

"Shut up Coral, you fucking newbie, and fuck you, bit-" her words cut off as Weiss flicked her finger in her direction and a Glyph sprung up around her tongue leaving the woman grunting in anger.

"Please, I'm from a town just like Shorelight, they made me join cos I was part of the militia!" 'Coral' cried, tears on his cheeks.

"They did tell us the pirates forcefully recruited remember," Blake said, meeting Weiss's gaze with her own, and something passed between the two that Ruby couldn't perceive.

Finally, Weiss said, "Well you look harmless," and flicked her hand, loosening her Glyphs hold and letting the bulky brunette fell to his knees. However she kept a single Glyph shimmering at his feet, just in case.

Looking at the pirates, Ruby noticed the only thing resembling a uniform amongst them were the bandannas and even those came in red, brown and grey. Everything else varied from height, to age,
to clothes. She could make out gun swords, sword axes, simple daggers, and a bit of Atlas gear like helmets or gloves, but not worn with any consistency but scattered around their frames haphazardly.

Jumping down from atop the Bullhead, Bolin spun his staff and said, "So the plan is the same, we fly, get back up and you-"

"Die," Spat the man Ruby had shot down. Older than the rest with wrinkles just fading in, thin orange hair and a beard. He wore Metal gloves, boots and an Atlas body suit, though he had looser leathers draped over that instead of armour, and a plasma rifle on his back. At their collective stare, the old man let out a sick, wet laugh, his shoulders shaking as he stared up at them with obvious mirth. "Let me guess, steal the Bullhead, fly to Mistral, and get help? Oh that's cute, as though we haven't had to deal with that before, hehe!"

Like a shot Blake was back inside the ship, and Ruby looked through her lens just in time to see an Atlesian Specialist Ship shoot through the sky like a dart.

"Damn!" Blake cursed, stomping her way back out of the ship and scowling down at the pirate. "They had a backup observer just in case the deal went sour. Knowing they couldn't deal with us they'll be heading back to their base and readying an ambush. I should have thought of this," She hissed, fingers digging into the wall of the ship.

"Hey, we couldn't have known that," Bolin said.

"I should have," Blake said.

"We should have guessed they'd have precautions, we assumed they didn't," Arslan said. She glanced at the pirate Weiss had loosened her grip on, who was just now starting to stop sobbing and asked, "What can you tell us about their plans, Coral?"

"Um, I'm new," he said, "but pull back, air patrols, they'll cut off paths to Mistral or safer settlement and there's trackers-"

"Shut up, new blood," Growled the old man.

"Ignore him, just talk to us," Yang said, hands coming down on the man's shoulders.

"I, I-"

"You know what the captain will do," Snapped the senior pirate.

"Hey, shut up," snapped Bolin, whacking the man upside the head with his staff.

"Ow, little fuck! Do you brats have any idea what you're doing?" He rasped, as the turn coat went completely silent. Smirking, with ugly orange teeth he said, "Of course you don't, just a bunch of little girls and boys playing hero. Once the captain cuts off your escape and hunts you down," he licked his lips, "You'll all pay."

"He- He'll destroy my town, all of it," Coral said, "he's unstoppable, he's a monster, I'm sorry, I can't say anything else!" he screamed.

"That's the spirit! I'll put in a good word for you with the captain!" Laughed the old man.
"Listen," Blake said firmly, even as a Glyph spawned in the old pirate's mouth to quiet him. "He's only saying that to scare you, you've already gone this far, there's more safety in siding with us than with him, he can't promise you anything."

"Uh guys," Ruby said.

"Yeah, and whatever he sends out, we can take, just tell us man," Yang said, trying to sound encouraging.

"I think he's-" Nadir started.

"Stop blubbering and help us out here!" Bolin snapped.

Coral's face was dripping with sweat, his eyes wide and frantic, Blake only seemed to realise it at the last moment as he burst into another bout of tears and tried to pull away from them all. He scrambled and scraped against the ground but Weiss's Glyph held steady, so Coral clamped his hands around his ears and buried his face in his knees.

Blake and Bolin stepped back, eyes wide in obvious worry, as the old pirate let out a grunt of amusement.

"I think we pushed too hard," Ruby said.

"This may take longer than planned," Arslan added.

"Still, we know about patrols," Yang added with a shrug.

"Which means they won't be attacking the town, yet, and then there's the trackers," Blake murmured.

Yang gestured to the new, if –now that Ruby looked at it- battered Bullhead, unloved unlike Stardust, dings and patchwork metal welding jobs covered its frame. Shaking her head, the only word that came to mind was 'shameful'.

"Well I can try and find those and-" Yang started.

"I can help!" Reese added.

"While we interrogate the remaining ruffians and work out a plan," Weiss said, scowling down at the old pirate who just squinted his eyes in obvious amusement.

"Maybe we should move this elsewhere," Ruby said, seeing the wary townsfolk eyeing them.

At the murmurs of agreement from them all, the pirates were quickly bundled up into the ship, and Blake flew them back to the warehouse.

A lingering thought ran through Ruby's mind as they flew, 'This isn't gonna be easy.'

Cords, cables, wires, screens, Dust and the shiny metallic apparatuses, along with tools that let her toy with them; this was where Reese felt most at home. The only place she was as comfortable was
sliding through the air on her self-made Hover board, unsurprisingly, a result of her love of technology.

Right now, Reese felt at home, sitting on a cold metal Bullhead floor, the cockpits control panels flipped up and the winding internals of the ship laid bare for her to see. An easy grin sat on her features even as she struggled against the pirates, vicious, hack job of securing their information.

Every Scroll her team had, every Scroll the Knights Errant had, were connected up to the Bullhead main computers in some way, laid on the floor, chairs, or the panels themselves. Loading bars flickered on holographic scene, password crackers flashed with new names and codes put in by false users every second.

But still no luck, a fact that left Reese's smile ebbing as she bit the back of her gloves in frustration. "This is just sick," she thought disgustedly. Yang had already retired from trying to tear out the tracking systems and Reese wasn't far behind her.

The one saving grace was her own Scroll, more specifically, the flight path record she'd been able to pull from the ship's massacred database. "Who'd have thought they'd be so close to Mistral?" She asked herself, looking at the captured ship's flight patterns. Each time it went out to a marked out town it would also fly a circuitous path 'back' to an island in the great lake that bordered on Mistral; though Reese knew from personal experience that the flight over that lake could be a long one.

"Have you had any luck?" Ruby asked, the scythe wielder's stomping boots somehow not hitting Reese's ears as she looked over her beeping, whining menagerie of machines.

"A bit," She hummed. "These pirates are savages, they tore apart these ships and their on-board computers to isolate like half of what made them work!" Reese said, tugging her Scroll free of its connection to the main hub with an annoyed grunt, before rising to face Ruby. "They've jammed and welded in trackers, removed communication logs and made the Bullhead reliant on these ruined systems."

"Ah," Ruby said, her mouth forming a little 'O' of disappointment. "Meaning we can't remove the trackers and stuff right?"

"Not without tearing apart half of what the ship depends on," Reese shook her head. "All I managed to pull up was a record of their flight path and a bit on how they stay in touch with each other with no tower. From what I’ve seen, I can only assume they're using left over battleship tech to keep their operation together, that matches with what I saw at the Support Tower anyway."

Shrugging Reese said, “I can barely interact with everything else on this ship because of their hardware tricks, the software massacre,” she spat, "and the fact I have barely tools after they shot us down!"

"Sorry," Ruby said slowly, almost leaning away from her.

Sighing Reese flicked her Scroll shut and smiled up at the other girl. "Not your fault. Anyway, how’s interrogation going?"

"Well," Ruby said, drawing the word out and rolling her eyes as they jumped out of the ship and made their way towards the warehouse where Weiss was keeping the pirates bound.
"Weiss and I tried good cop bad cop, but we didn't have much to offer them because of how great or scary they think their captains is," Ruby said. "Then Bolin and Nadir went for cocky cop and, uh..."

"Awkward cop?" Reese asked, puffing a lock of hair from her face and chuckling with Ruby.

"Yeah, that didn't go too hot either, and now Yang and Blake are trying the whole 'be scary' thing," Ruby said.

"So how's that going?" Reese asked.

"Just talk you pricks!" Yang roared, her words followed by a crash of metal as something blasted through a wall.

"Not... well," Ruby finally said, the senior pirates' laughter echoing from the room.

The crew of six were bound to the grey cement floor by Weiss's Glyphs. Each one looking some mix of faux stoic in a bid to hide their fear, or simply annoyed. Only the wrinkly pirate seemed different, seemingly relishing in the situation, as he looked them over.

"Calm down lass, perhaps take a seat in my lap!" He jeered. The shock-wave of fire that radiated from Yang was enough to clamp the man's mouth shut though, as the wave of golden heat washed through the air.

Sliding up next to Arslan with Ruby, Reese said, "So uh, still no progress?"

"No, they're either loyal or too afraid and delusional as to their captain and crews ability. Too much so to be reasoned with," She said briskly, arms folded and her usual look of impassive concentration. "You?"

"Well, I know where their base is, but that's about it," Reese said.

She was a little shocked at Arslan's wide eyed stare before the blonde patted her head and said, "Good work Reese, that gives us new options."

"Oh, what's that I hear?" crowed the wrinkled pirate, drawing Reese's attention to him. "You know where our base is? Cute, and what will a band of brats do with that, eh? You still know nothing of our patrols, ya can't remove the trackers without totalling the ship and," he chuckled, "If you fought the captain you'd be taught your place right quick."

"Says you," was Reese's reasoned and thought out response.

"Says facts, you slag." He shot back.

"Screw you!" Reese, shouted, taking one step forward and hand hovering over her revolvers.

"Screw me!" He laughed.

Growing Reese's balled up fists shot open, but just as she reached for her guns Arslan's rough fingers clasped around her wrists. Meeting her gaze her leader shook her head and said, "Ignore the trash, he's beneath us."
"It's you two, who'll be benea- argflffs!" He grunted as one of Weiss's Glyphs popped into his mouth again, leaving him to only gesticulate wildly at everyone.

Their teams quickly came together under the sunlight let in by the warehouses open door, no one looking happy.

"Look, we're getting nowhere slowly," Blake said, her ears flicking as she clasped her weapon tightly.

"And listening to this brute's ranting is doing my head in," Weiss added, having, since Reese last saw her, changed into blue boots and a long white overcoat that hid... pretty much everything.

"Can we wait it out? I mean, Mistral would have to send someone out to check soon right?" Nadir asked.

"It took a long time for them to notice the problem already," Arslan said, "They may act faster now, but without context they'll be flying blind and right into any number of traps and ambushes."

"Besides, the longer we're left waiting, the longer they have to bug out, or come here in numbers," Yang said, the blondes teeth were grit and she kept clapping her hands together and cracked her knuckles.

"Even if we could stop the pirates if they attacked," Blake said slowly, refusing to meet anyone's gaze as she looked at the floor.

"There's no guarantee we could save the village, or any other location they may swarm with number, let alone the waves of Grimm that would follow," Arslan finished.

'Guess that's one of the things you pick up in living in the wilds,' Reese mused.

"That relies on you stupid brats being able to win," Snorted the grey haired woman who'd been shouting at them before. Snarling, she added, "The elites could tear you all apart like paper bags, and I'm gonna love watching."

Seemingly powering through the woman’s commentary Ruby said, "So, unless we get them to talk the pirates are either gonna run away, or blow Shorleight away?"

Seeing Ruby frown, Reese nudged the other girl, but didn't see her usual smile come back and was lost for anything else to do.

"Ruby," Yang said, "We'll figure something out," the blonde said, making her way over to her sister.

Before she could go in for, what Reese guessed would be a hug, Ruby's face shot up; she gave the pirates a look and finally said, "Why don't we just fight?"

"Uh what?" Nadir squeaked.

"Well, we're all Huntresses and Huntsmen, sure some of us have credentials and some of us don't," she added with a little shrug. "But we're all here to fight the bad guys and save people; plus now we know where the bad guys are."
"Ruby," Blake said tightly, "While I agree with you in theory, this isn't one person or a mass of Grimm, it's a borderline military outfit, almost certain to have people just like us at the head."

"So? When we first met we took down a whole White Fang group!" Ruby shot back. Gesturing to Bolin she said, "And I heard about that cartel fight you guys got into. How is this any different? Yes, they might see us coming, but that doesn't mean we can't win and it's better than sitting around doing nothing."

Silence reigned for a few moments, everyone seemed to be looking at everyone and nothing all, at the same time. Reese couldn't stop a little tremor of trepidation in her chest at the thought of that happened if they did fight... and lost? 'Is this what Nadir feels like all the time?' She wondered, trying to shake off the chill instilled in her by classes on crime, history and the older pirates nasty words.

Off to the side Bolin looked to be clutching his bo-staff hard. Finally he droned a noncommittal, "I mean... we could," as he rolled his head from side to side, looking for some sort of guidance.

"I agree," Arslan finally cut in, clipped and quiet as usual.

"Pardon!?" Nadir wheezed.

"I dislike it," she amended, one hand held up flat to forestall argument. "I dislike the idea of dragging you all into such a fight, and if you don't wish to accompany me, that's is acceptable. However, there's no denying, the longer we wait the more precarious our and everyone else's position save the pirates becomes."

"If we're gonna act, do it now huh?" Yang asked, slipping behind Ruby to hug the smaller girl and plopping her chin down on her sisters head.

"At this point, our options do seem few and far between," Weiss said, "I guess that could work."

"I agree, we can't just stand by if this is our only choice," Blake said, half looking at the pirates.

"And you guys?" Ruby asked, looking over Reese and her team mates.

"I'm already with you," Arslan said quickly, "my team though, I believe it may be better for them to stay on guard in Shorelight."

"What!?" No way!" Bolin said, his voice high pitched. Spinning his bo-staff around he laughed and said, "We're not letting you guys have all the fun!"

"I'm with yas!" Reese cheered, slipping her arms into Ruby and Arslan's, practically swinging off the duo.

Blinking warily, Nadir, gulped and said, "If it's what we have to do, it's what we have to do."

"You're sure?" Arslan asked again.

"We're sure!"

"Ooh, and Zwei can watch over the pirates and Shorelight, until we get back!" Ruby added.
The little corgi trundled over to the pirates and growled menacingly, even as its tail wagged jauntily about.

Looking over her team, Arslan pursed her lips and finally nodded, "All right then, we can leave, once I have a bit more information," She said.

"Uh, didn't we just decide that wasn't working?" Yang asked.

"Not about how to solve this problem without fighting, that stopped being an option once we were discovered, however I’d like to know more of what we're going to face," Arslan said. "And if nothing is forthcoming," she added more loudly, "there's no need to keep them."

"Uuh, wait what?" Ruby added quickly as Arslan strode forward.

Arslan’s stride, slowed only long enough to nudge Blake and mutter something at her before her march picked up speed as she approached the pirates. Not even sparing a moment’s hesitation, Arslan’s right hand lashed out and dragged the wrinkled pirate into the air by his throat.

The Glyph holding his stupid tongue still vanished at Weiss's gasp and the man grunted, "Ooh is this the bit where you get rough with me!? Hah, that'll work!"

Arslan remained silent, Blake trailing behind her a few feet as she dragged the wrinkled pirate into the office and slammed the door shut.

The office was dark and sparse, save for a few rotting crates and overhanging shelves. All of which shook as Arslan weakly –for a Huntress- slammed the wrinkled pirate into the wall. While the man reeled, held at eye level by her right arm; Arslan's skin boiled, and she ran her free hand over her eyes, repressing a hiss at the stinging sensation.

Yet despite his gasping, the pirate's levity didn't waver, he stared at her, smiled with rotting teeth and said, "Oh a tough one are you? Figured something like you'd go straight for the mo-"

Arslan's left palm shot out and with a clap of flesh, she brought her right hand up, and was grasping both sides of the man's head. His meagre flailing, bouncing off of her Aura, the way a lambs charge would bounce off a boulder. Aura swilling and twisting in her body, Arslan's already ruined throat swelled up as she growled out, "Stop talking, human."

His confidence wavered, just for a moment, eyes widening, smile going rigid before he started to force a sickly snicker. "Oh, is that what you are little bint? I wouldn't have guessed by looking, guess your humans are keeping the leash on tight?"

Arslan smiled, it was not a friendly or pleasant smile, white teeth were bared and showed her gums. Sharp teeth, likened to fangs, could be seen even in the miserably dim lighting. Her hold on the side of his face tightened and she could feel his Aura straining like something ready to pop. A deep rumbling growl echoed in the closed off room and his silence was gained again.

She slid two fingers on each hands over his face until she pried his eyes wide open. Throat straining, she snarled, "Do you know the story? Of Faunus and Grimm being the same?"

Spitting the man said, "You're animals, not Grimm, now get this over with."
Arslan snorted, a deep, wheezing laugh escaping her nostrils and strong enough to blow his hair back. As her chest swelled and her grip tightened further, Aura flooded her eyes and they stung painfully as heat began to radiate from them. "Human, that is wrong," she groused.

Pressing her face closer to his, eye to eye, she growled, deep and thick as her skin began to stretch, bones strained and cracked and popped, as her skin grew coarse and thick.

"Now watch closely, prey."

All eyes were on Blake as she guarded the office door, her own team, Arslan’s, even the pirates. As Ruby looked about to speak, Blake raised her hand and said, "Just wait and see."

She’d have liked to reassure them but the muttered instructions Arslan left her had been little more than an instruction to follow her lead. Now though her feline ears, first at the sound of the Haven student's words that finally gave her an idea of what she was planning, then they twitched and swivelled at the sounds of cracking bones and twisting flesh. Memories were bubbling to the surface, the stench of blood in battles and wounded protesters limbs being jammed back into place in crammed little cells or safe houses.

"Blake, what is she-" Yang started.

But the sound of someone's breathing going higher and higher, the smell of fear as it engulfed the body, and his frantic scrambling echoing in her eardrums, was all consuming. For a moment, Blake shivered, and then the screaming started.

Desperate, hysterical, screams of gibbering terror, no words, just half muffled shrieking.

Everyone seemed to startle at that, and then a roar tore into the air, shaking the windows and floor, as the wooden door exploded in a shower of shrapnel that hovered around Blake for an instant where time seemed to stop. A golden outline with burning red eyes faded into the darkened office and the pirate scrambled on the floor, desperate for an escape.

Blurring in front of him, Blake tensed her Aura, arms up high and teeth bared she loomed over him, black shadows radiating from her frame like she was vibrating dark matter, obscuring the face and leaving only darkness.

"Get away!" The pirate screamed and before Blake even knew it, Yang was shoving her aside and the pirate practically threw himself behind her in a bid to hide himself.

"Leave!" someone shouted.

Blake flung herself backwards and burst through a window in a shower of glass. Her chest twisting up on itself and her heart was beating in her ears like a drum. An unpleasant coppery taste stung her tongue and Blake pressed herself up against the nearest wall and let out a ragged gasp.

'I never wanted to feel like this again,' she thought, as someone, their voices were blurring together, demanded to know what the pirates had planned for them. 'Please just work,' Blake thought, clutching her belly as she felt it seemingly bubble and coil on itself.

Yang's boots crunched on the gravel as she walked out of the warehouse, and let out a sigh of relief.
at seeing Arslan and Blake leaning on a nearby wall. Ignoring, or gulping down any nervousness, Yang waved and said, "Hey guys," she did indeed sound that awkward. "Your little performance worked like a charm, five stars!" She added, grinning with two thumb up.

"He talked then?" Arslan asked from where she leaned against the wall. Her eyes were closed and she looked very much like she was meditating, with Blake simply leaning on the wall at her side in what Yang could only describe as a 'cool' or perhaps ‘broody’ pose.

"Yep, after you guys pretty much neutered his ego, he and the rest spilled all kinds of beans. Ya know the old dude hasn't brushed his teeth since he became a pirate?" Yang asked.

"Given his breath, I had considered that," Blake thought with an accompany 'ug'.

Silence lingered for a moment, and with a twitchy smile, Yang finally sucked in a breath and tackled the Goliath in the room. "So, I noticed his Aura hadn't really gone down, and I get you guys just gave him a scare. He actually got pretty specific on you guys being Grimm in human skin or whatever." She glanced at Arslan and said, "Said some stuff about you having the head of a lion and an unhinged jaw, and I figured out was Blake was doing with her shadow clones so… So, yeah, thanks for taking one for the teams there, sorry if I was a bit, ah," Yang rubbed the back of her head, "Aggressive when stepping in."

"We all played our part, it’s hardly worth thinking about so long as it worked," Arslan said.

"Fair enough," Yang said, finally slinging an arm around Blake's shoulder. "I hope this didn't bring up any bad memories," Yang added more quietly, Blake's ears twitching as Yang's words washed over them.

"It's fine, nothing really," Blake said.

"If it bothers you, it's not nothing," Yang said, giving Blake's shoulders a squeeze.

"Yang, its fine," she stressed, "I was just reflecting on some things; besides, at least this time, no one actually got hurt."

"I wouldn't say that," Arslan said.

"What'd I miss?" Yang asked.

Looking up at them both and blinking rapidly Arslan said, "Rubbing Burn Dust in your eyes to make them look like a Grimm's stings."

Ruby locked the second last of her cartridges into Crescent Rose and smiled at the satisfying sound and feel of her creation vibrating as it took in a full round of ammo.

After a brief summary of exactly what Blake and Arslan had done to undermine the pirates’ confidence so much it hadn't been long before they readied to set off. Making sure to leave some food and water out for Zwei just in case they weren't back by night time.

Around the rather crowded Bullhead, everyone else was making their own preparations while Blake and Yang readied the Bullhead for lift off. Final tweaks and inspection of weapons, pat downs for supplies and other equipment were all being given the usual rounds. Though with the
added looming figure of Arslan opting to check in on everyone to make 'sure', that they all wanted to come and were ready.

"You guys ready to put the stomp on some pirates?" Reese asked, stamping on her Hover-board to make it spin into the air and into her arms.

"Oh yeah!" Ruby said with gleeful grin.

"Shouldn't we be discussing a strategy?" Weiss asked as she spun Myrtenaster’s Dust revolver with a mechanical 'whirr' that Ruby would freely admit she loved hearing.

"Indeed," said Arslan. "This is an altered military base camouflaged within a mountain on an island. We're liable to face their blockade, along with reinforced walls, a heavily armed and dug in fortification, long range defences."

"And that's not even getting into them wanting to just bug out through the air-bay, or the fact we'll have to keep an eye on the radars the entire way in case they send forces to attacks Shorelight," Blake added, accompanied by a click of Yang’s fingers with the blonde going 'points!'

"So wait, we really think they'll just try running away?" Ruby asked.

Blake shrugged from the pilot’s seat as she revved up the engine, the powerful thrum of the jets vibrating the ships frame as the wings flared up and they began to lift into the air. "It’s possible, it'll be hard to gauge how they will react. But with the trackers, we can't sneak passed them and if we start doing damage to their ships they may just decide to scatter and reform elsewhere provided they haven’t left already."

"Huh..." Ruby said. 'So even if we break in and catch the bad guys, we could still have dozens of pirates flying every which way?' Turning to Reese, eyes flickering to the cockpit, Ruby asked, "So can we talk to the pirates, like is the radio working?"

Shrugging, Reese said, "Sure, its locked into their sub signal and given how freaking torn up the whole thing is and the wall they put up, we can't exactly call anyone else on it."

"That's fine," Ruby said, hugging Crescent Rose to her chest Ruby marched into the cockpit and without much fanfare pressed down on the radio controls, hard. "Hey, pirates, we know where you are and we're coming for you. Two full teams of Haven Huntsmen and Huntresses! We're leaving some people behind to guard Shorelight as well, just in case you thought of doing something really stupid."

The radio crackled and finally a sharp chuckle rumbled through the cockpit and a man said, "Come, and, get us, children." And then the radio went dead.

"Well, I guess they'll all be waiting for us now!" Ruby said cheerily, as she looked over the gaping stares of her friends.

Finally, Arslan took a step forward and clapped down on her shoulders and murmured, "Ruby, good idea to ensure they focus their forces, but please don't ever do that again."

"So," Blake said, "even if they do concentrate their forces on base thinking they won’t need to retreat, we still can’t sneak around them thanks to the trackers, meaning an assault is our best bet and I'm gauging us at taking about an hour to get there."
Stepping back into the crowded cockpit it was Arslan who spoke first. "Our first priority will be cutting off their means of escape by securing their air docks on the side of the mountain."

"Do we even know where that is though?" Weiss asked. "I mean, yes, the pirates said it was somewhere in the middle of their fortress and facing East, but even then..."

"We are liable to face a lot of hostility in trying to bypass their firing line," Blake added, "Finding the entrance and getting inside could be rather difficult, even if we use Weiss and Bolin's Semblance to speed up the Bullhead, there's only so much I can do once we get so close."

"So we need a means of breaking their firing line, getting in and cutting off their escape routes, all without being shot down," Arslan said, rubbing her chin, "I have some ideas."

"I do to," Ruby said, eyes already trailing Arslan's bandages and Gambol Shroud's ribbon.

"Unacceptable," Arslan said firmly, even as Ruby looked up at her with those big silver eyes filled with hope and determination.

"What? Come on this sounds awesome!" Yang said, looking up at her fellow fist fighter, from the floor of the crowded cockpit.

Glancing at Yang, Arslan said, "Dividing up our forces in a three pronged assault leaves us too vulnerable, if we're going with such a plan I'd rather we have as large numbers as possible on our side."

"Aw come on, we can handle it," Bolin said from where he was leaning up against the wall.

Huffing Weiss said, "I think it's risky and crazy, but also our best chance, so long as we remember to retreat if things get back and can try to regroup it can work."

"You did say you had confidence in us, and the Knight Errant seem on board," Nadir added. Despite his words, the shifty look in his eyes told Arslan his support was born more from that of those around him, than his own feelings.

Biting her tongue, Arslan sucked in a low breath and said, "Are you sure?" at Bolin and Reese's nods she turned to Bolin and said, "Nadir?" The boy gave a small jerky nod. Trying to ignore the tension running through her frame, Arslan said, "Very well, we'll go with your plan, Ruby."

Chapter End Notes

Hello once again to any and all readers, as always thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases for their help with this chapter and to all of you who've read, liked, commented and faced! We're nearing the homestretch of chapters now, so I hope this was a good set up for the ensuing invasion segments.

On Arslan's intimidation thing, I tried to leave it fairly vague and as something I could maybe pass off as a lighting/Dust/Aura trick if we find out her canon Semblance, but if we don't or I am somehow right (Absurdly unlikely) then her Semblance basically transforms her body into that of a bipedal lion that enhances all of her attributes for a
brief time before tiring her out. She only a bit of it here over the whole thing so she didn't expend much energy.

As to their plan, they're mostly opting to not try going to Mistral because they know the pirates have faster ships than them and if they aren't expecting an attack then they might seek reprisal against Shorelight or just leave if they somehow failed to catch the team.
Blake's hands were wrapped tightly around the controls. Her eyes trailed across the window and screens of the Bullhead. Pushing the Bullhead's lever forward, it moved with an irritating little clunk, reminding her of how much smoother and sturdier, if maybe a tad slower, their Stardust had been.

Down below the dark green and brown swamps of Mistral were giving way to deeper pools of water and stagnant rivers. Up ahead, and blurring towards was the sparkling blue water of Mistral's great lake and outlined in the distance a thick island topped with a tall brown mountain.

"Uh, we got, ah, enemies," Nadir said from his co-pilots seat in the nearly empty Cockpit. His eyes were locked on the scanners as they began to shine brighter, with dozens of tiny dots circling the island flashing onto the screen.

The earpieces in her human ears gave off a slight buzz and Blake spoke. "We have incoming, at least ten ships, get ready."

"Roger that Blake," Weiss said.

"Oh yeah, everyone get ready for the action!" Yang crowed over the winds battering against the headsets microphone.

Groaning, Nadir looked towards the window even as his fingers nervously grasped the Bullhead's twin winged mini-gun controls and said, "We're all going to die aren't we?"

"This plan is totally foolproof!" Was Ruby's snappy reply.

"Foolproof like that half of a bullhead you flew in with?" Nadir said.

"You are made of salt and cruelty," Yang said.

"Incoming fire!" Ruby shouted, the snipers cry stinging Blake's ears.

Even an average Huntress could dodge a bullet, even a regular Huntress could dodge and deflect machine gun or rocket fire. Even at her most humble, Blake knew from personal experience that she was already better than many Huntresses. Add six months of roughing it in the wilds against Grimm and sparring with three people at her level, who were even stronger or faster, had only made her better.

Aura ran through her body like lightning, every muscle primed, every sense wired. So when a missile came hurtling towards the ship Blake saw it coming. There was only an instantaneous moment to act but she took it. Slamming down on the throttle and pushing the lever forward she shot below the missile, leaving it to soar overhead and explode as Ruby opened fire.

"The ships are moving!" Nadir shouted.

"Blake?" Weiss asked.

"Now!" She ordered, and like that two contrasting waves of Aura rippled through the ship.
The metal hummed and clinked as a wave of orange energy flowed through the steel. Gravity's hold weakened and their ships engines pushed them beyond what a mere Bullhead should ever be able to do.

The second wave of Aura Blake felt personally. Sharp, structured and smooth, a line of gold weaved its way through the ship and the sound of clock gears grinding filled her mind as the world slowed.

Two purple beams of energy flew from the base of mountain, accompanied by small rockets and thick sniper-cannon fire. A line of rickety Bullheads spread across the air and unleashed a wave of golden flashing bullets from mini-guns.

To Blake, it was slow, like some old pistol, half-cocked and filled with wet ammo.

Spinning the lever and yanking the controls ajar, Blake twisted the ship on its side and right between the missiles. A stream of machine gun fire was ducked and weaved through as the gunners tried and failed to keep pace with her even as they desperately fell back to maintain their firing line. Someone was rambling on the radio and she could hear the others shouting and whooping in fear or excitement, but the world was slow, and Blake was beyond fast.

Yang stood atop the liberated Bullhead, a wide grin on her lips, eyes red and her blood pumping. The wind whipped and crashed against her frame, throwing back her golden mane. Everything was a blur, the air was cracking and popping all around her and Yang could scarcely keep track of Blake's flying, let alone the enemies save that they were flailing.

Ships spread across the sky spun and drew back at their approach. Searing bolts of laser fire tore through the air. "They're using Battleship cannons!" She shouted, though the smaller blasts obviously came from a bastardised version, likely to save on Dust. Streams of bullets and explosives tore through the air but with Blake's flying, and Ruby's sharp shooting only a few stray bullets were plinking off their Auras.

The world fell out from under her again, and Yang could feel her inside trying to rush up and out of her at the dizzying speed of the drop. She didn't go flying into the sky though, bound as she was with the rest of their mishmash team. Tied around her waist was a simple band of white cloth, though she could feel the firm, weighty touch or Arslan's Aura meeting her own. She wasn't the only one like this either, save for Weiss, everyone atop the Bullhead were bound together by the Aura infused strips of cloth. Yang couldn't keep herself from letting out a manic laugh as the ship turned on its side as they approached the final line of the desperate blockade.

"It's time!" Weiss shouted.

Ruby fired Crescent Rose at an attacker, even as they rushed to the tail end of the ship, careful not to let the hurricane-like winds tear them from their purchase.

Yang barely heard the 'fwoosh' of an engine burning out as Ruby's bullet tore through the enemy Bullhead's jet engine like it had so many others but she did hear the blast as the wing flew off and the ship fell out of the way.

"They'll reform," Blake's voice said, distorted and warbling because of Weiss's time dilatation, as they tore through the line of ships and the looming mountain came into focus.

"Now!" Blake shouted, the engines flared, their flames roaring and scorching the air.

Weiss spun around to face them, hands flying and weaving, her Aura sung and a shining Glyph
flared up behind them.

The ship swerved in the air and an instant before the force might have sent them flying, Yang spun around and slammed her feet against Crescent Rose's Blade. At her side Arslan was braced against Reese's upturned board. The air smacked against their backs and just as they were to be dragged into the sky they pushed against their bracing, Aura unleashed in an ethereal blast to fuel their leap.

Crescent Rose fire and Yang grinned as she felt the extra jolt of speed granted to her by Ruby. At her side, Arslan accepted the same boon form Reese. Everyone jumped, their bodies became light and they were pulled along by the force of their jump, the ships momentum and Yang and Arslan's torpedo like charge.

As they burst through Weiss's speed Glyph, Yang realised what it was like to be Ruby. The world vanished, all save one tiny pin-prick in the centre of her eyes. Grass gave way to brown rock that rose up beyond her sight. Sharply cut squares and circles for weapons fire had been carved out, hidden by faux stone that could be lifted up to unveil a firing line of bullets, missiles and laser cannons at a moment notice. It was meant to overwhelm any too weak or too slow to withstand it, and right now, Yang was neither.

Flames flared around her form, Yang drew back her fist as she tore through the air like a comet. Arslan's Aura radiated next to her own and they let out a unified roar as they punched the fortress walls, their strikes were explosions, and they tore through the walls in a wave of fire.

In an otherwise dark room a large rectangular computer of shining silver and blue projected a dozen holo-screens. The flashing screens cast shadows across the stone-carved walls and floor, images of a single Bullhead rushing their blockade on every screen. The light of the screens illuminated a floor strewn with worn clothes, the nest of cables keeping it powered and three figures surrounding a large cushy lounge.

Looming over the screens, arms folded over his loose green fatigues, Reaver watched with a grim set to his square features, framed by shaggy hair.

A second, comparatively tiny man, was stretched out atop the top of the lounge. One kneed pointed towards the ceiling and his chin held up by an open palm as he snickered at the display on screen.

Finally, a third figure occupied the three person lounge himself. Leather boots resting on the rim of the projector. His long brown coat, loose fitting pants and shirt might have given off the appearance of a slacker had he not been lined with bullet casings and knives. A beaten wide brimmed hat sat atop his head and a half finished cigarette was clenched in his teeth.

Carmen sucked in a smoky breath as he eyed the kids atop the Bullhead with a bemused grin. 'That looks fun, I'll have to ride into Shorelight like that,' he thought.

In his left hand sat a shiny new Scroll, from which the voice of a crew member said, "Sir, they're on the roof and just dodged around one of our scouts!"

Carmen ignored Blur's snickering, "You should have sent me" the speedster said teasingly.

Toying with his Scroll Carmen chuckled and called out in a sharp crisp, but above all else, amused voice. "Remember crew, these are not Grimm, they think they're Hunters and that means they won't go down on us that easy!"

"Give these kids all of your attention like the squalling brats they are, but never forget they're just a bunch of little bints. Fight with yours eyes on the prize, like they're the only thing that you see and
once we've got them on their back by pills or by bullets, **devastate them!**

A calamitous cheer bellowed forth from his Scroll and Carmen let it drop to his side as he went back to watching the ensuing debacle. "Hey someone call the twins in here, I won't be needing guards for this and they might as well watch too,' he said, thinking of the heavy armoured gunners he'd sent to watch the bases top entry point.

Blur let out another laugh as something shiny flared atop the ship form one of the Huntresses, somehow she looked familiar but Carmen couldn't place it. "Look at-em go!' Blur cheered as they shot forward.

Unsurprisingly, it was Reaver who had to be ruin the mood as he rumbled, "You're being too casual about this."

Waving a hand as he toyed with his Scroll, only half watching the screens Carmen said, "Please Reaver, when I heard we might have Hunters incoming I got us ready for a full on assault by the best of the best." Snorting at the screens Carmen spat at the approaching Bullhead's projection and watched with amusement as the spittle went straight through the white haired girls head. "Instead though we get a bunch of stupid kids charging head first into enemy fire, frankly I feel blue-balled."

Pulling up his Scroll as the Bullhead weaved out of the way of a missile Carmen said, "Keep those bullets firing, make sure the missiles and lasers fly, and remember the first step to all murder is to have fun!"

Satisfied at a job well done Carmen groaned as he stretched his legs out and looked over the Huntresses again. *Honestly, pretty things like that, wish they were villagers, then we might keep them, but even students can be irritating,* Carmen thought. Rolling his head to the side he amended, *Well maybe just one or-'

"They're gone!' Reaver spat.

Carmen's eyes shot towards the screens, but all he caught was a blur of metal and then nothing. The intercom on his Scroll was suddenly filled with chatter as his crew started squawking at each other. "What's going on!?!" He snapped.

"They're too fast!"

Carmen felt rough hands glide across his gloves as Reaver dragged him and his Scroll up and barked, "Fall back, focus fire!"

"We're trying, th- they're turnin-"

Even at the top of their mountain carved base Carmen heard it. A thunderous crash, a furious, booming roar, like exploding stone and a firestorm combined.

"What the fuck?!" he bellowed.

"They just shot themselves into the armoury, they-aaah!' The overseer wailed before they were cut off as something cracked across the Scroll and a feminine voice shouted, "You the bosses? We're coming for ya!' her tone was tinged with manic excitement, while another, rougher voice shouted, "Docking Bay!' in the background.

Spinning sharply Carmen said, "Blur get to the-" only to freeze as he found the room empty save for a sticky note on his wrist reading *We already left, bae.'*
"I fucking hate them," Carmen spat, as he threw his head around to watch as the Huntresses Bullhead flipped out of the way of the remaining airships attempts to gun them down from behind.

"Sir, they're fast, one of them's freezing the jets and-" the pilot's report was cut short as gun fire echoed through her ship and her last words before the radio died were, "We're down!"

Carmen's eyes flickered from one screen to the next. A blue light flashed in front of the Bullhead, and it suddenly rocketed away from a pincer manoeuvre, leaving his ships to get shot down by bullets and ice. The Bullhead spun out of the line of fire from another stream of mini-gun before the circular flash flared around the attacking ships engines and it suddenly lurched backward.

'We have fifteen ships out there, ten inside, plus Blur's, there's eight-' He watched the Bullhead flip over a tailing ship shoot out its engines from above as it began to climb. 'Nine active ships lost. We're facing a two, no three pronged assault, they'll cut off the exits and their ship will be coming here if I... Wait, white hair and Blue lights? Those are fucking Glyphs!'

Decision made, Carmen rushed out of his private chambers, bursting through the steel door into his private air-bay, Carmen ignored the stair-well entirely, 'Reaver and Blur can look after them,' he thought. "You two!" he shouted at his black armoured guards at the mouth of the cave, "Fall in, I have a plan!"

Eyes strafing over the long thin bay, jam packed with monitors, engine parts, food stores, long winding cables on thick plastic mats and the thin metal runoff cutting down the centre towards the mouth of mountain. 'My Ship would be here too, if Blur weren't so intent on fucking around and got it burnt up, but no matter;' Carmen thought.

Blurring to a metallic stage, Carmen leapt up atop it and grinned down at a grim faced woman with dark hair.

"Sir?" she asked, with a lazy salute.

"Technician, help me get the fuel cannon online," he said, with a wide grin on his unshaven face. "We're going to catch ourselves a Schnee!"

The armoury they'd torn into was a grand, circular chamber. Carved from brown stone and reinforced with steel. Multiple tiers allowed for several firing lines to drown the enemy in waves of bullets and missile fire. Stuck into the walls proper were clunky looking laser cannons and missile launchers connected to bulking Dust engines.

'About a hundred pirates, the majority of the crews in here then. Good,' she thought. Most of the bandanna wearing pirates were on the walls, or clustered in small alcoves around heavy duty radio equipment or weapons stores.

It was not however, such a pristine place anymore. She and Yang had torn a gargantuan hole in the ceiling. Their landing had sent out a burning shock wave, melting and scorching much of the floor into a charred black mess. More than a few soldiers were already down and Team 'Speed' were already tearing across the chamber.

The pirates were rallying, bazookas and mini-guns being raised as their commanders bellowed orders, while a few brave or foolish souls charged the fist-fighting duo. Sweeping out her attackers feet, Arslan grabbed her orange bandanna-clad foe and flung her into the wall, the stone smashing under the force. 'We don't have time for this!' She thought, mind already a whirl over her team.

"We're coming for ya!" Yang shouted.
"Docking bay!" Arslan shouted above the rising din and she was pleased to see 'Team Speed' pull together and charge out of the room even while it left her stomach sinking.

'They'll be fine,' she told herself, still eager to finish up and chase down her team, Arslan looked over at Yang and watched her fling an Atlas armoured pirate out of a metal filled alcove filled with wires and boxes. 'A radio room,' she realised, recognising some of the machinery, like a chunkier and barer looking Support Tower with no satellite.

Yang slammed her fists into what could only be a main hub, a cylindrical metal chamber easily waist height. Golden light and fire lanced outwards, as Yang threw herself back and the alcove exploded in sparks and fire.

"Open fire!" Someone roared.

"Yang!" Arslan shouted, drawing back her fist and charging the blonde, she almost bit her tongue as she shouted, "Fist bump!"

The spark of excitement in Yang's eyes was instantaneous. Hair shining gold she lunged at Arslan, her own right fist drawn back, Aura rippling around her skin as they lashed out. Fists collided with a powerful crash that roared in the air, their Aura ran over each other's frames like a surging wave of water and were channelled into the ground.

The tortured earth shone red and gold as a shining wave of light and a rippling tide of metal and stone surged in every direction. Shouts of pain and surprise rang out as the shock-wave sent the pirates flying into the air and walls, guns exploded and Dust fuel surged and flared out.

Feet skidding along the sizzling ground both Huntresses fell back to back, eyes trailing across their foes, only a few had withstood the blast. Most were groaning on the ground or imprinted into walls, body's limps and cracks now ran through the entire chamber.

"All right I think-" Arslan started, only for her ears to twitch.

She and Yang spun around towards the wide, stone-cut door of the armoury. Standing rigidly, in a black bodysuit, with a square jawed face and brown eye, framed by straw blonde hair, was a man. He towered over her, in fact, Arslan could tell he'd tower over Yang as well, his limbs were lanky but rippling with muscles. On his hands were what looked to be two thick metalled whisks that were slowly spinning.


Finally he spoke, in a deep voice that boomed, "Anyone who couldn't handle that get out! You have no place in this fight." Any murmurs of surprise or curses were silenced as his weapons began to spin, a high pitched metal scream filled the chamber and he lashed out with two punches that sent the spinning weapons flying at them.

Instincts kicking in, Arslan flipped over the blade and Yang did the same; she could see a trail of air, like a miniature tornado chasing the weapons. Eyes trailing to the man Arslan balked in shock as he shot across the ground and before Yang could even touch the ground sent a right hook at her chest. Yang barely brought her arms up to guard in time but the force of the blow rocketed her into a wall and left the blonde embedded in steel.

The buzzing intensified and Arslan rolled around another attack from the spinning blades.

'Malleable, long distance control, wind manipulation. He's strong, fast, and deadly efficient,' she thought.
Off to the side Yang tore herself from the wall with a grunt and Arslan found herself staring down both spinning blades as the seeming elite fell into a defensive stance at Yang's charge, while one of the few remaining soldiers bellowed, "Open fire!"

'This won't be easy,' Arslan thought, and some little part of her relished in that, even as her mind wandered to her teams state.

'I need to finish this fast!'

As the sound of Team Strong taking care of business in the armoury flared up, Ruby and her Team were already in action. One hand clasped around Bolin's Bo-staff, Ruby pulled him and Reese along by her Hover-board.

Her Semblance ran through her body like a shudder and Ruby unleashed a burst of rose petals as she shot into the air. Blurring and over the rough cut stairs and bouncing off the walls, she ascending higher into the fortress.

As she shot upwards, her team blurred passed several open caves, roughly cut and cramped, they were packed with whatever swag the pirates could keep. However the looming light shining in from a room that's roof was vastly higher than any of the others told her she was getting close to the air docks.

A spindly man with spiky blond hair lobbing grenades at her also gave Ruby the impression that room was important.

The explosives were wreathed in flames and fired from a reloading high speed launcher. Half a dozen were hurtling towards her and Ruby slammed her booted feet into a wall and swung Reese and Bolin upwards.

Releasing her hold on Bolin's weapon, Ruby watched as Reese flipped in the air, Bolin holding onto her shoulders precariously. Baring the bottom of her board upwards Reese tucked in her knees and then thrust back out. An emerald wave of light rippled through the air and in an instant the grenades shot back up at their attacker who shrieked in surprise.

As the duo flipped back down Ruby watched the man throw himself back as the grenades chased him into the chamber. An instant later a gout of flames and rubble bust from the room. Digging in her feet Ruby let her Semblance rip, and launched herself up and into the smoke. A massive figure flew by her, parting the smoke, and barely missing Reese and Bolin as he fell to for the base level.

'He must be one of the elites, be careful Yang!'

Jumping into the room, smoke trailing after and flooding the chamber, Ruby spied her foe; framed by the sunlight let in by stone-cut airship entrance. It was wide enough to fit two Bullheads or something like a hundred Zwei's at once. His battered Atlas Uniform was singed, his hair was burnt, the tips still in flames. That was ignored those as he shouted and readied to fire.

Ruby didn't give him the chance.

Swinging up Crescent Rose in one smooth motion she squeezed the trigger and the high impact round was unleashed. Hurting through the air it crashed against the Aura charged grenade just as it left the launcher. There was a terrible moment of realisation from her foe as the blast was triggered and he let out a loud shriek before being lost in flames.

Speeding around the massive open chamber Ruby left a trail of rose petals, smoke and dust behind her. She blurred, shot, ducked and weaved her way below, above and around Bullheads, staffed by
a small gang of partially armoured mechanics. Those that she saw, or who tried to attack, found themselves sent flying into the air by her slamming Crescent Rose into the ankles and dragging them after her until they went flying off.

She could hear Reese and Bolin leaping in through the door and into the fray with raucous laughter. Coming to a halt before the massive hole in the mountain-side, which the pirates had no doubt been planning to evacuate from. Ruby's eyes flicked over the fifteen ships scattered in the docking bay, no less than three engines flared up as pirates tried to escape, the rest pointlessly rushing Reese and Bolin with guns, batons or wrenches. Not bothering to watch Reese and Bolin's sweeping victory, 'Yang's starting to rub off on me,' Ruby thought as Bolin and Reese literally swept their foes feet out from under them.

Ruby brought back Crescent Rose and opened fire, her Aura charged, armour piercing rounds tore into the jets with a calamitous clang of tearing metal. The flames flared up and died just as quickly, the jets either crunching into nothing or bursting into flames.

'Ou,' she fired, 'two,' the jets exploded in a sea of shrapnel and steel, 'three,' she thought with finality. The last armour piercing round bypassed the jet and busted a hold straight into the fuel line, blowing the wing right off and leaving each ship helpless.

"Everyone take one ship!" Ruby ordered.

Bolin and Reese jumped at her commands, splitting off and leaping through open doors or breaking in windows to finish off the crews. For her part Ruby flung Crescent Rose back and charged at the one ship that was aiming squarely at her. Its mini-guns began to spin and a stream of loud bullets exploded through the air.

Blurring from side to side, Ruby sidestepped every shot, leapt into the air and cleaved the front window open in a spray of glass, the screech stinging her ears. Levelling Crescent Rose's barrel at the stunned crew she fired, the force sent her body rigidly flying back and the cockpit was engulfed in a blast of fire. 'Explosive rounds, yeah!' She thought cheerily.

Landing atop an empty Bullhead's wing Ruby looked into the cockpit and sound the pirates staggering around, trying to stand only to collapse from their injuries or exhaustion, their mismatched uniforms now crispy. Battles done, only the faint sounds of torn metal forlornly swinging by a metallic thread, and the strong mountain breeze hit her ears.

Jumping from her perch, Ruby jogged to meet Reese and Bolin in the centre of the wide open chamber, the metal floor, -obviously a bit thrown together, from what she guessed were chunks of the battleship- clanging with each strike of her boots.

Coming to a stop Ruby jumped up and cheered, "We did it!"

Reese jumped at her and pulled Ruby into an excited hug without even hopping off her Hoverboard, allowing her to be taller than Ruby herself.

"Oh yeah, air docks secure!" Bolin said, raiding his staff in victory.

"Oh yeah, very secure," a blasé and high voice said. Eyes widening and weapons ready, they all looked right to see a man in a black body suit with silver hair and a cocky smirk on his face standing right behind them.

'When!? How!?' Ruby thought.

Hands on his hips, he leaned forward and well within striking range and said, "You kids really did
Bolin acted first, swinging his Bo-staff at the man.

Body shifting into a blur, the pirate leaned out of the way of Bolin's attack and shot behind him. Coming to a stop his hand shout out and rubbed the boy black mop top as he said, "Aw, you're adorable!"

Ruby shot forward, rose petals flickering from her steps she brought Crescent Rose down in a mighty swing and- slammed the blade into the ground, cratering the metal but leaving their foe untouched.

"Wooh, quite the speedster ain't ya?" He asked from behind her.

Ruby kicked out at him, even as she pulled Crescent Rose up and Reese flung herself at the man, an emerald wave of energy was unleashed from her board, but he was already gone.

"You kids put on quite a show!" he called.

They all looked up to find him stretched out on-top of a Bullhead snickering. "But now, how about I show you a real performance?"

Blake's vision of the world had long since returned to normal. Once the others had torn through the pirates' base the firing line had broken and the ships scattered. After that it had been a simple matter of outmanoeuvring the pilots. Some may have been good, but none of them had Weiss's Glyphs speeding up their ship or the Huntress hurling down waves of fire and ice in addition to skilled flying and mini-gun fire.

As the last vessel was sent careening into the hill-side Blake began to climb. Weiss's 'hup!' hit her ears over the howling winds as her friend jumped back into the ship. Glancing to her side, she saw Nadir's obvious relief despite having handled himself well enough in the fire fight.

"I imagine we're heading for that opening near the top of the mountain?" Weiss asked, if she was tired it scarcely showed, her breath sounded tight to Blake, but nothing unusual.

"I haven't seen anyone fly out of the air dock," Blake said with a pleased grin on her face. Pulling back the lever she angled the ship up and flared the engines, sending them soaring towards a thin opening near the top of the mountain. "We're going to strafe by and you two can jump out, then I'll swing around," Blake said.

"Excellent," Weiss said, her tone tinkling with amusement, despite Nadir's nervous groan as he shot up from his seat and drew his rifle up to his chest and made his way onto the deck.

Tilting the ship to its side Blake pulled back on the engines, she felt the weight of gravity push against her and-

Something was coming, she could hear Weiss and Nadir gasp, a hot buzzing sounds somehow keened above the roiling high winds and a faint light flashed in her peripheral vision. Blake slammed down on the throttle but it was too late, a purple beam pierced the tip of her ship and a second tore her left wing right off. The roar of the Bullhead's engines died, and she could only guess more shots were coming.

"Move, move!" Weiss shouted, the lyrical hum of her Glyphs ringing as Nadir shouted in surprise.
Blade flickered out of her seat and dashed for the open deck, Weiss and Nadir at her side they leapt through one of her Glyph and were launched forward. In an instant she saw the long cavern before them, filled with metal and machines with a distant figure in brown standing at the back. With the smirk on his lips and two sniper rifles that would be on par with Crescent Rose, she knew he was responsible.

Another blast of laser fire was unleashed and only Blake's Semblance saved her as she flung herself below the blast and came crashing into the chamber floor. In front of her Weiss skidded to a halt on her Glyphs and Nadir-

"Aaah!" he let out a cry as he slid along the floor, went into a roll only to fall into a hole marked only by stairs. What followed was a mass of gun fire and shouting.

"Nadir!" Weiss cried, rushing to the hole as Blake drew herself up and readied her weapon. Another blast of laser fire cut off Weiss's charge and flew into the distance.

"I'm OK!" he shouted back, panting but evidently alive.

A peel of laughter rang out across the chamber, echoing and booming all around them. It rattled around in Blake's mind and she shuddered at the memory of Adam's laugh, moments before he called for the terrible power of his Semblance upon a foe. "Not for long lad!" He shouted, and two beefy looking armoured soldiers who'd been pressed up against a nearby wall jumped down after him, one toting a mini-gun and the other a flame thrower. "Make sure the lovely Schnee and I aren't interrupted," he ordered, looking over Weiss with a sharp toothed predatory smile.

Weiss drew back her blade as Blake came up to her side and they stood shoulder to shoulder against the looming pirates' captain. Something in Blake's chest shook as she took in the towering warrior, memories of every time she'd faced someone bigger and stronger than her flashing through her mind.

"You know me," Weiss spat, but somehow it lacked her usual vigour Blake thought, something was absent...

"Oh I know you, you'll make a right pretty bargaining chip my dear, your pet though," he shrugged, "maybe I'll let you keep her."

"You watch your mouth!" Weiss spat, but still she stepped back, rather than towards her foe as Blake was so accustomed to her doing when insulted. Even as her sword began to hum, lighted up by blue energy, Weiss's stance seemed ready to dodge, not charge.

"Ah well," he sighed, "I did offer dear, come then girls, let me show you your place."

Blake's eyes scanned futilely for traps, for more fighters, for something to explain her sense of dread. Only one person had ever left her so shaken and some pirate with a mad cackle should not be bringing up a horned, redheaded figure in her mind that whispered. 'They saw you Blake, they know the stories of our kind, and they won' be making deals to keep you safe.'

Teeth grit, Blake rushed forward with a shout as the captain raised his gun, Weiss trailing just a moment behind her.
Hello once again, thank you for reading! As always thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases for beta reading and to all of you who have liked, faved and commented, if you have any critique please don't be shy :)}
Chapter 34 - Pirate Signal: Furious Finale

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The cavernous armour was filled with the sounds of gun fire. Yang rushed towards her for what felt like the hundredth time, the buzzing of his weapons somewhere in the distance. The lanky bruiser fell into a defensive stance and Yang rushed in low. Each step resounded with a powerful boom of force and just as she was ready to strike, fist radiating heat as she lashed forward, he flung himself to the side and Arslan appeared before her.

Both Huntresses slammed their feet into the ground, tearing up stone and earth and they tried to skid around one another. The gunfire increased in tempo and Yang almost found herself blinded by the flashing lights and deafened by the buzzing. Gasping, Yang threw herself towards the spinning weapons.

She did so just as Arslan kicked off from the ground, intent on striking one out of the air. Their bodies flew close, their move adjusted and Yang felt a rush of air at her side.

'Shit!' Yang thought as the elite, if the soldiers yelling was accurate, 'Reaver's' fist collided with her cheek. Her Aura strained under his strike and Yang was sent hurtling back. The wind rushing by her ears with a howl as bullets rained down on her.

Every instinct made her flick her wrists to open fire on the floor below and shoot herself into the air but without Ember Celica she only managed to slam her hands into the charred floor. Pulling her legs up Yang squinted and grunted as the bullets cracked against her Aura. Slamming her feet into the ground, she jumped, intent on taking out the supporting fire.

Hair flying back, Yang blurred towards an armoured pirate. The mini-gun wielder balked at her approach, too stunned to act, only for Reaver to appear before her with a flash, and throwing out his palms. Yang found herself crashing against a dingy green force-field.

'He's good!' Yang thought as the shield flared under her strike, but just as it looked to be about to shatter it simply vanished and-

"Yang!" Arslan shouted.

Before Yang knew it Arslan slammed into her side just as Reaver's buzzing weapons dove down from where she'd just been.

Spinning in the air they threw themselves apart and came to a skidding halt right before a wall.

"Fire!" some distant pirate roared.

Yang grunted as a wave of gunfire and rockets descended on them. 'If I had Ember Celica this wouldn't be happening!' She thought.

"With me!" Both Yang and Arslan said as they shot left and right. Yang really wanted to slap herself at that only it seemed Reaver was happy to do it for her, as his spinning death whisks bared down upon her while he and Arslan got into another round of fisticuffs.

'I hope the others are doing better!"
"I hate you!" Bolin roared, bo-staff held high he slammed the blade tip down and dug a hole in the floor. Eyes flickering around in pursuance of his target he found nothing but, then a clap of flesh rang out as the pirate slapped the back of his head.

"Too slow!" Shouted the jaunty speedster as he dashed across the room, his entire frame pulsating with speed and power.

Reese flicked out her revolvers and fired, green tinted bullets flying through the air but each one was neatly sidestepped and left to leave hole in the walls and floor but their damned target unharmed.

Waving from atop a Bullhead the pirate grinned down at his foes. His revelry was cut short though as a loud bang echoed in the chamber. Spinning around he saw a red blur bounce off the wall with a clang as Ruby shot towards him in a maelstrom of rose petals.

Heaving Crescent Rose behind her, Ruby squeezed the trigger and readied to swing, only for Blur, as he’d called himself, to flicker towards her at the exact instance she squeezed the trigger. Just as she felt the force of the shot run through her Aura, he hopped over her and her eyes widened as she felt his foot slamming into her back, once, twice, three times. Stumbling and flung forward by her own momentum, Ruby hurtled off the top of the Bullhead.

"Ruby!" Reese cried.

Eyes widening as Blur tossed down a grenade, Ruby clenched her chest and sent a pulse of Aura rushing through her body. A blast of rose petals flew forth and she was rocketed away from the blast just as the grenade flared up, dodging the fire even as the shock wave flung her back.

"Haha, you kids are adorable!" Blur cheered.

'His voice is different, the grenade, his kicks, what is wrong with this guy?' Ruby asked herself. Flinging herself over, she slammed Crescent Rose's blade tip into the floor and ground to a halt.

"Incoming!" Reese shouted as more grenades started soaring through the air. Brandishing their weapons to beat back the explosive all sides assault Ruby heard Bolin mutter as he batted one grenade away with a clang, "When I get my hands on him I am going to shove my staff so far up his ass."

The smack of flesh and the flaring of Aura rang out, accompanied by gun fire and the cracking of the air and earth. Yang and Arslan were shoulder to shoulder before Reaver.

Both were jostling forward in a bid to break through the elite's guard as he backpedalled away from them, arms up and flying swiftly in sharp cuts in a bid to bat away their strikes.

Yang was having none of that, however. Growling, she let her Aura flare and burn its way across her skin until it stung and threw a right punch towards the man's chest. 'Shit!' She thought as the buzzing intensified only for Arslan to break off her assault and spin around. Whatever she did next was beyond Yang’s sight but a loud clang rang out and the spinning death machines didn't hit her.
Reaver's hands flew up before her strike, palms flat and his dingy green Aura manifested before her fist. Yet just as Yang's fist collided with it she felt it give way, leaving her blow to lurch awkwardly in the air as he weaved below it. Contorting himself to the side he lashed back with a kick to her chin and flipped away just as Arslan tried to slam her foot down on his head.

Yang's Aura radiated with fire and her strike burned through the air, sending bullets flying back or melting to nothing but he was getting away! 'Every time we get the advantage he separates us and we waste energy!' Yet even as they'd tried to break his spinning death machines his soldiers would rain down fire upon them or they'd break off and fly away leaving him to attack from the side. It was like fighting someone with four arms but two of them could be any damn place!

The spinning red weapons tore out of the ground in a spray of steel and turned on Yang. 'If they'd just stop dodging!' She thought, grinding her teeth as she back-flipped away from their whirring dive towards her. The sound of a rocket being fired hit her ears. Despite her ability to withstand such a blast, Yang caught Arslan flicking out her arm and unleashing one of her fireballs upon it, causing a deafening explosion in the air that beat against her Aura.

Spying Reaver lunging at Arslan, Yang shot forward and lashed out with a stream of weaving punches only for him to throw himself backwards as his blades cam spinning back towards her and Arslan. Another stream of bullets battered against her Aura and Yang's Semblance flared and surged inside her at the bee-sting like jabs as she outwardly seethed.

'I can't keep this up forever, and this is his fucking plan, isn't it? ' She thought. Taking off from her spot, weaving between gunfire as the blades pursued her Yang dashed around the room on eye on Reaver and Arslan's fight. Fist and kicks flew and cracked like lighting, Reaver's extra reach of less use than he'd like like as Arslan kept pushing into his defences but his buddies' extra fire kept letting him retreat.

Something exploded behind her. Arslan dodged away from an explosion and then Reaver burst from the smoke and delivered an Aura charged palm strike to her stomach. The force of it rang out like the fallout from a blast, Yang felt it ripple through the air as Arslan was gagged and was sent hurtling towards a wall.

Feet slamming into the ground, Yang sent a pulse of Aura into the floor and kicked off, the metal warping under her strength as she surged towards Arslan. The buzzing blades tore passed her and Yang felt another chunk of her Aura get ripped off with, a splash of blood and skin flying off before her Aura sealed the wound.

Arslan however, flipped herself over and when she crashed against the wall, leaving the metal and stone rippling but unbroken. Skidding up to her side, Yang could see a wave of bullets approaching followed by Reaver and his weapons. Letting out a furious roar, she clasped both fists above her head, let her Aura surge as wildly as it pleased. Flames encompassed her body and hair, turning into a rippling gold pool of energy as she slammed her fists into the floor. A stark golden shockwave exploded through the air and earth, bullets were beaten back. Reaver's weapons went off course and as the approaching explosion of magma-like earth exploding towards him, even as the elite jumped back.

"We can't go on like this," Yang panted, she could already see them rallying, something like a smile on Reaver's face. 'Oh you think that's all I got?' She thought, clutching her hand even as her Aura struggled to be dragged to the surface more and more.
"I've a plan," Arslan hissed, and before Yang could even think to ask what is was Arslan pounced at her back, a desperate shout, "Yang!" rang from her lips and Yang found herself rocketing across the floor, away from Reaver's weapons and the man's charge.

'Oh she didn't!' Yang thought as both spinning weapons torpedoed towards Arslan. The blonde fighter threw her arms out however and a mass of her bandages unfurled.

Grinning almost madly, Yang spun on the floor and dug her feet into the charred earth before launching herself at Reaver. The man was drawing back his hands as if to pull back his weapons but her shout, "Mine!" as she hurled herself at the man in a wild tackle distracted him.

"Get off!" Reaver grunted, swinging his arms out and striking Yang across the face.

The force of the blow made her bones ache and crack, her boots skidded along the ground but she chuckled at the sight before her. Reaver's face was wide with shock, only for a moment and behind him, Arslan had thoroughly tied up his weapons. Thrusting her arms out she unleashed two massive gouts of fire while Yang ducked and weaved at Reaver, fists flying, wide enough to hit him but far enough that he could only dodge back, his control failing.

The metal whined and screeched as the fire warped its frame; their attempts to fly tangled and ruined by Arslan's bindings as she slammed them into the ground and charged.

Just as Reaver lashed out with a kick, Yang jumped back and grinned as Arslan swept Reaver's feet out from under him. Before he could so much as try to regain his footing, Yang pounced while he was still falling. In mid-air, Yang pounced, driving her knees into forcing him to let out a gasp she drew back her fists and struck.

One after the other, faster and faster as her Aura shrouded fists crashed against his skin. She could hear the ground caving in below them as the force of her blow radiated through his Aura and with one last burning strike to his face Yang cratered his head into the ground. Only a groan emanated from his throat as Yang felt Arslan gentle clasp her arm and pull her up.

"Good moves there," she said.

"You too..." Yang panted, "We really pulled it together in the end," she continued, casting her gaze out across the stammering pirates as they held their weapons to their bodies like shields.

"Hold fast yo-" whatever their armoured leader was about to say was intruded as a deep snorting snarl echoed in the chamber. All eyes turned to the hole she and Arslan had made upon entrance to find a well above average Boarbtusk snarling as it dropped down onto the parapets and snorted at the pirates.

"But the Grimm left us alone for months!" The armoured man screamed as the hulking beast stared him down, its coils flaring as it stamped one cloven hoof into the ground, denting the metal floor.

"They're attacking because you're weak now, no longer of use to them," Arslan said with a deliberate air of calm Yang thought. Her fellow Huntress cast her gaze across the room and said, "If you thought they were doing anything but using you, you're more foolish than I thought."

The Boarbtusks armour clicked as it jumped up and rolled itself into a ball, spinning like a white cannonball.
"Open fire!" The pirates roared as the Grimm began its assault.

"Should we help?" Yang asked.

"Let them handle it," Arslan muttered, then in a blur she drove her foot into Reaver's side drawing a pained whine from the man as his chest cracked. "He won't be healing from that within an hour, let’s go."

"Right, let’s get the others," Yang said, leaving the pirates to their fate as she and Arslan sprinted towards the steps.

"Out of ammo!" Reese shouted, Aura flowing into her pistols as she engaged their shift into a board, keeping a tight grip in case their attacker tried to nab her weapon.

Bolin stood at her back, deflecting wrenches, pipes and blades that seemed to fly at him by the dozes with metallic clangs as his spinning staff sent them flying.

Ruby brandished Crescent Rose to fire, but before she even could 'Blur' sped off and vanished into the air docks again.

Reese took to the air, Ruby could see the other Huntress was biting her bottom lip, eyebrows knitted together in frustration. Bolin wasn't doing much better, staff spinning around him and kicking up a whirling little breeze as he looked every which way for the next attack. The air docks were pockmarked with burns, dents and burning craters from their battle and so far no one had laid a hand on the pirate!

' He's trying to wear down our ammo ,' she thought, noting the remaining two bullets in her own magazine.

"Hyaa!" Bolin shouted as he slammed his bo-staff into the floor, once again missing his target. Cursing as he spun around in a bid to hit the pirate who weaved between one, two, three blows with amused ease before dashing by Bolin with another laugh. "Get back here!" Bolin raged.

' Our ammo and our patience ,' Ruby thought, already having lost track of the elite in one of the Bullheads. "Hup!" Ruby jumped from atop the Bullhead she'd been surveying their battlefield on. Crescent Rose was clutched tightly in her hands as she and her team scanned the air docks.

' Too many Bullheads, he keeps hiding, and we can't hit him, but there's so little power to his attacks, long distance bombings, weird voice and... the air. ' Ruby thought, eyes widening in a dawning moment of realisation.

Not even waiting, she shot off, boots squeaking against the floor as she dashed for the door. On her path she blurred around Bolin and slipped her arm into the boys and tugged.

"What the crap!?" He shouted as his feet fell out from under him and he was dragged through the air. Darting between a Bullhead Ruby came upon Reese and grasped her hand.

"Woah!" She cried, being dragged along for the ride as Ruby skidded to a halt in front of the door.
and let them lurch to a halt as well.

"Running away?" Blur called out, his word dripping with a mocking 'baby-like' tone.

As Bolin stood up, grunting in annoyance Ruby spoke quickly as she dropped to one knee and stretched out her other leg in a sprinting stance. "I have a plan, stay at the door, do not let him through and hold onto your butts," She said firmly.

Blinking the duo drew back into wide defensive stances, Bolin's staff taking up more than half of their enemy’s potential exit. Reese's hover-board was angled upwards and read to release a gravitational shock-wave if he tried as well.

"Oh, this should be cute. Wanna race, kiddo?" Blur asked, casually waltzing atop a Bullhead and looking down at her.

Not even meeting his gaze, Ruby's eyes flew across the room in one last scan, before she levelled Crescent Rose at hip height and said, "I wanna win." The world became like a tunnel for one instant as Ruby surged forward, rose petals swirling in her wake.

'Forward, right, up,' she thought, breaking off from her straight run into a hard angled. She did not skid to a halt at the sight of the wall, instead she jumped and let the momentum carry her up. Not letting the rush of wind and all important rose petals stop, there Ruby launched herself downwards like a missile.

Crashing against the floor, she flared her cloak and blurred forward. Each step was a powerful, barely perceivable stride as she weaved between the tattered and tipped over Bullheads. Angling down, Ruby felt the tunnelling wind and rose petal trailing her. Launching herself into the air with a Semblance boosted leap, she dragged, swirling, writhing wind and rose petals behind her in an ever increasing mass.

Indifferent to the growing looks of confusion following her, Ruby pin-balled herself across the room. She became a swirling mass of red trailed by howling winds. Each sharp angled lap made the wind following her as she launched herself harder and faster with another burst of Semblance born speed flaring through her body.

What followed her was no longer just the growing mass of rose petals and wind though. Ruby could hear scraps of metal tools being dragged from their resting placed and sucked into her maelstrom. The air-docks grew into a calamitous fury as her tailing tornado's occupants crashed against Bullheads, the force making the massive ships screech as they were almost sucked in and the sea of red rose petals grew.

"Ru-" she could heard Reese shout, she was too slow, too, too slow as something flashed at her feet.

'Grenade!' 

Ruby squeezed the trigger, the grenades heat grew, her Semblance flared, she could hear the beginning of an explosion.

Ruby launched herself forward, her body twisting and contorting and she wrapped herself up in her cloak and as the grenade exploded behind her it too was drawn into hurricane.
It started so small, a strong gust of wind trailing after her, some rose petals and nothing more. But the blur grew greater and longer, the winds began to howl and drag shrapnel into itself and the rose petals were blinding.

'She's blocking my view!' Blur realised as red petals became just as much a part of his vision as the floor or the walls.

Tensing his body Blur called on his Semblance, the world around him slowed to a crawl even as he himself just felt a clenching tightness inside his chest. 'I can hold it, Aura to spare, Reaver will be done soon,' he told himself.

Feet sliding along the Bullhead's top Blur batted away the spectral petals, in a few swishes, only to be met by a larger, grander wall beyond his reach. 'Blind me, trap me with the gale-force winds, she's figured it out!' The Bullheads slow metallic screech seemed to drag on forever as the petals drifted around him as though falling from the sky on a day with no breeze.

For the first time, in a long time, Blur was shaking. 'The door!' Not even a true conscious thought so much as instinct. Blur leapt from the Bullhead and his feet slapped against the floor. He could hear the howl, and the screeching, but not her footsteps. 'Too much noise!' He thought, almost clutching his ears.

Careful eyes flickered through the minuscule gaps in red, his memory too precise to forget the door, but Blur knew if he didn't step careful he'd be dragged into the gathering maelstrom. The wind tunnel was rustling his hair and howling but no matter how fast it was Blur was beyond mere speed. Cutting a sharp path through the slowest petals, one almost staying in place he grinned as the cracked light above the door came into sight and-

'No!'

Blur ground to a halt, the surging winds tugging at him like a rip tide, like gravity. The swirling rose petals and shrapnel tore through the air cutting him off and those two kids were in place, feet sinking into the ground thanks to he could only guess some kind of gravitational Semblance.

Almost too shocked to notice it was only the vibrations running through the ground, different than those he'd picked out being made by the speedster. The vibration ran through the floor and Blur's eye's widened as he scraped and clawed himself away as the emerald Aura blast tried to blast him off his feet.

'No, no, this is not happening!' Blur thought, escape was never far away, one trip, one mistake, one step too fast to follow and he could-

Blur smiled as he dragged himself along the ground, the howling winds drowning out everything as they coalesced. But he could still see her, only the boots but that was enough. 'The wind's caught in a tunnel, too controlled, girl. The ground still stable,' he thought.

Pulling a grenade free from his hip pouch, Blur ran a brief calculation in his head and then with all his strength sent the grenade sliding across the floor. The moment it left his hands it seemed to slow to a crawl but in less than a second it'd be at the air-docks' opening and right at the brat's feet as she bypassed her friends and continued her charge. 'She'll be blasted right out and I escape.'
Releasing the tension in his soul Blur let out a sigh, he heard the green girl trying to shout a warning, but the explosion went off and he looked up and-

'No,' Aura pulsed throughout his body, the world slowed but Blur was too late.

The girl became a spiralling red blur and vanished from sight for an instant. The air around him roared as it surged, faster and faster. Something exploded near him and Blur looked down to see the red spiral come to a violent stop mere inches from where he was beginning to be sucked off the ground. A mischievous smile on her face and a victorious glint in her eyes she sped up and ran past him and through a shrinking gap in her wind wall.

Blur screamed as he saw it coming from all directions but was helpless to move, suspended in the air as he was surrounded by shrapnel, dragged through the air with break neck force by the winds. All around him massive Bullhead were closing in on him, as he was pulled into the heart of the maelstrom.

'Reaver!'

The last thing he saw was red rose petals.

Bolin let out a gasp and he staggered against his staff, Aura finally receding and the weight lifting from his frame.

"Ruby!" Reese shouted, already kicking off on her board in search of the other girl.

Looking up from the ground Bolin gasped, "Woah." Before him was a massive pile of metal, rubble and banged up Bullheads. Only three or four had managed to avoid Ruby's hurricane thing, the rest were now in a ruined mess in the middle of the air-docks.

'Note to self, never let her get a run up,' Bolin thought as he hopped from the hole his feet had sunk into and jogged around the pile. He was just in time to see Reese pull in a panting and exhausted Ruby from the air-docks rim. The speedster having evidently thrown herself out and jammed Crescent Rose into the cliff face to avoid being sucked into her own tornado.

Ruby practically collapsed against Reese who looked at a loss for what to do for a moment save letting the red head lean against her and pant while making sure Ruby's weak knees didn't give out under her.

"You, ah, OK there Ruby?" Bolin asked, making it a point to inspect her pale sweat marked face.

"Fi...ne.... ahh..." Ruby gasped. "Check... on... Bluh," She gagged and looked for a moment like she'd throw up.

"Ah it's OK Ruby just, ah, um," Reese stammered.

"M... fine," Ruby groaned groggily, "Tired... Need a min...ute... check on..."

"Blur, right," Boolin said, glancing at the ruination Ruby had brought. "Sure we can't just leave
him?"

"Bolin!" Reese snapped.

Raising his hands in surrender and said, "All right, just saying he was a dick." Jumping onto the top of the pile with a clang Bolin prodded the steel with the tip of his staff, waiting to hear the man's irritating laugh. What he got instead was a low whine and a faint, frantic scratching of hands on steel.

"You alive in there!?!" He shouted, clanging his staff atop what looked like a tail fin.

"Help!" Was his muffled reply.

Sighing Bolin grasped the wing and with a pulse of Aura lightened it enough that moving it was child's play. As he slowly pulled away the layers of steel towards the ever louder pirate he half listened to Ruby's explanation.

"So how'd you...?" Reese started, letting Ruby flop down on her Hover-board and tipping some water from the canteen Arslan made them all bring into the other girls mouth. As Ruby licked her lips Reese simply rolled back on her feet and watched, letting the girl pant herself back into a less exhausted state.

Blinking warily Ruby looked up at her as if through a haze and finally spoke. "When he ran, there was no rush of wind, if he was fast there should have been one. The way he talked too and how... how weak his hits were, his words were all blurry and his blows had no momentum... I realised he wasn't fast, he just looked fast relative to us."

"His Semblance was time dilatation?" Reese asked.

"I guess so," Ruby chuckled. "Anyway I realised he was just running distraction or trying to tire us out. That Semblance exhausts him too though, it's why he kept hiding from us... Anyway," Ruby continued, eyes swaying from side to side as she dragged herself up with a groan.

"Anyways, I realised he could see all of our hits coming, even mine, so I thought, huh, maybe if I make it too hard to see with rose petals we can surprise him!" Glancing at the wreckage Ruby chuckled and added, "And after that it kind of spiralled into a whole, uh, thing."

"Hey if it worked, it worked, that was like one of the coolest things I have ever seen!" Reese cheered.

"Reaver can you read me? I need you, someone, anyone get me out!" Cried a panicky, ragged voice from within the pile. Bolin was standing atop a flat piece of steel that was shaking as Blur tried to push it off himself.

Sighing Bolin drew back his bo-staff and slammed it through the metal wing with a weighty thrust. Blur let out a screech and then went silent.

"I just didn't want him running off," Bolin said as he pulled the sheet aside and grabbed the man by his limp arm and yanked him free of the metal he'd been contorted into.

"Hey not judging here man, that guy had it coming," Reese said, barely even batting an eye as Blur's mass of cuts, bruises and his torn bodysuit.
"Yeah I just didn't like the idea of leaving him to die like that if we could help it ya know?" Ruby said.

"Eh its fine, that'd be pretty dark," Bolin said. Then he tensed as Blur let out a low groan and before the man could so much as twitch his head Bolin swung him around and headbutted him back into unconsciousness.

"Phew, that fights done," Ruby said, arms sagging down with relief.

"And hey we secured the Air-docks!" Reese said, beaming as she looked at the ruined hall and amended, "Well most of the air docks... Point is no one is going to be escaping this way and that's something to be proud of."

Before they could celebrate further Yang’s voice shouted, "What the crap did you guys do in here!?"

Followed by Arslan saying, "Are you all OK!?" as she skidded into the chamber just a few steps behind Yang.

"We're fine, and it was Ruby, freaking rad is what is was!" Reese shouted back as the two blondes shot around the mass of tangled metal and started patting their team mates down.

"I heard gun fire up above, the others are still fighting, can you act?" Arslan asked, hands on Reese and Bolin's shoulders.

"We're good, but Ruby..." Bolin said.

"I'll be fine!" Ruby said, even as Yang hefted the smaller girl onto her back.

"Yeah you're on time out Ruby, you did your part, really, really well," she said, smiling up at the destruction her sister had sewed. "We took out all the pirates on our way up so we can leave the docks and check on the others, Ruby and I will hang back," Yang said.

"Good, Bolin guard the rear with Yang, Reese you're with me," Arslan ordered.

And like that, they were off, sprinting up the steps and towards the top of the fortress.

The cavern was alight with purple light, as laser fire seared through the air, casting shadows and driving them back. Blake gasped as she launched herself left and backward with an after image only to almost trip as she slid along the floor.

Falling into a crouch Blake brought up her cleaver to guard, panting she thought. 'Too many cables, I can't-'

Another peal of laser fire made her ears sting and Blake barely ducked the thick beam. Just as it travelled down like a whip that left her back searing in ghost pain, Blake scrambled and rolled to the side, metal and wire scraping under her touch. Another after image later and she ducked behind a computer terminal, eyes wide as she tried to catch her breath after the captain’s unrelenting
'Where's Weiss?' she asked herself, trying to calm the frantic beating of her heart only for the
tingling weight in her skull to distract her. Trying to push her feeling aside Blake popped out from
under cover and prepared to open fire on the captain from where he loomed over them.

'A perfect target, I can...' she thought, only for Weiss to blur across her path with a battle cry,
sword drawn back as she charged. "Weiss!" Blake shouted, dashing out after the other girl.

Bringing both guns to bear, the captain sent her a wicked smirk as he opened fire. What looked like
hundreds of tiny laser bolts surrounded one massive lavender blast of laser fire. Blake threw herself
to the side against and only half saw Weiss jump to the opposite side of the room.

'Weiss is charging? With her Glyphs could have, she could've...' Something stalled in Blake's
mind. Her feet quaked for an instant and a mass of bright lights nearly blinded her as the captain
unleashed another wave of laser bolts on her.

Blake launched herself back again, even still it felt like each shot was smacking against her Aura
unleashing a sharp stinging pain across her skin.

'Weak!' Adam's voice roared, the sheath of his sword crashing against her cheek with a crack and
sending her crashing to the floor. A shudder run through her skin and the world blurred, were those
tears?

Then a burning strike crashed against her cheek and Blake felt her Aura flare under the abuse as she
was sent spiralling through the air. She caught a blurred image of Weiss, seemingly frozen in
place, watching with wide blue eyes and Blake felt her heart twist in on itself as she wanted to
scream.

'We can't ever expect help from humans,' Adam's voice whispered.

'Stupid,' Blake thought, 'I reminded them what I am...'

Adam's speech rang out in her mind, 'They'll watch us die as they would a Grimm!'

"No..."

Nadir let out a scream as the deep clunking gun down the hall roared to life and it sent a spray of
bullets his way. Half turned in the dimly lit yellow stone-cut hall, his eyes widened at the black
armoured soldiers bearing down on him.

'One, two, three, four,' Nadir's hissed as the first bullet crashed against his shoulder. Aura reeling
he rolled with the strike and flipped over and below the stream before kicking off the wall and
down the hallway.

'Stupid, stupid, why'd you even try to count!?' He asked, himself, as he staggered to his feet.

A loud crunching sound rang out and Nadir gasped as a wave of heat slapped against his neck.
Instinct kicked in and he kicked off from the floor, a cascading wave of fire melting the stone
behind him.

The chambers flashed in purple lights as Weiss tried to weave between what seemed like a hundred blasts at once. Some were large, most were small but came by the dozens and it had taken her shamefully long to realise it was the captain utilising two different gun types. 'Stupid girl,' his grin seemed to say when she'd caught sight of the barrels and he'd sent her retreating to the mouth of the.

Aura flooded through her and into Myrtenaster like water. Her blade hummed as a blue outline began to shine and as she heard the machine at the captain's feet hum she slammed her blade tip into the ground. A wall of ice rose before her, crackling and hissing as it swelled up before her and blocked him from view.

Only for the captain to laugh as he shouted, "Trying to hide, poor form doll-face!"

Weiss glowered at his words, wanting to block out the man's smarmy words and face. Clutching Myrtenaster, she sent an extra burst of Aura into her Lighting Dust canister. 'I can meet him head on with -'

Her thought was cut off as she heard Blake let out a shriek and fly passed her. For the brief moment their eyes met she could have sworn there were tears in the Faunus's eyes.

"Bla-!"

Weiss's words were drowned out as the ice above her head exploded in a shower of sparkling fractals. Spinning around Weiss ducked down, catching a brief look at the captain's face. His sharp, dark eyes, towering figure and bared teeth. The words of that foul pirate they'd captured ran through her mind, the captain’s threats and Weiss suddenly felt her entire body shudder. Everything felt clammy, her skin felt bare and her clothes too loose. It was like a thousand eyes were staring at her.

'Pretty little girl - Her father's little doll - A sycophantic bitch - Tease!'

Teeth grit she draw back Myrtenaster, only to let out a gasp as a massive beam struck the dead centre of her ice wall and tore through it.

Weiss threw herself backwards as a splash of laser fire flew by. Myrtenaster shook, almost slipping from her sweat soaked hands before she sucked in a breath and clutched it as hard as she could, though her grasp felt clumsy and imperfect. 'Stop this, it's just a fight, you've done this before, he's just this isn't... Damnit I'm a Huntress!' She thought, teeth burying themselves in her tongue as she tried to back bit back a yelp of fright as thick beam of purple laser fire flew towards her.

Summoning a Glyph below her feet it rang out with a lyrical ice and the sound of cracking ice, memories of a cold empty house ran unbidden through her mind. Desperate to guess where his next attack might come from Weiss looked to her foe and met the captains cold, judging eyes. A sickness welled up in her stomach, her insides coiling on themselves under a gaze that left her feeling bare and pawed at, again and again and-

'As expected, you're unfit daughter,' Her father’s voice whispered.
Weiss’s footing stumbled, before she could even blink a searing pain exploded against her chest. She was thrown back with a scream, deaf to Blake crying her name as a wave of laser fire washed over her.

Nadir felt like he was going to barf, the world felt numb, his head light and wavy as he pressed himself against a wall. Sucking in another deep breath that left his stomach gurgling unhappily he shivered as two sets of heavy footsteps struck his ears, accompanied by a metallic clinking.

Without a thought he skidded along the floor and around the corner and opened fire with a shout. The ratatata of Nadir's gun was the only sound he could hear. Clutching his weapon close to his chest, Nadir was leaning out from around a hallway corner and spraying his armoured foes.

Both pirates were bracing, bodies lowered, head down, turtling Arslan had called it once. As the spray of bullets clinked against their armour though he saw it ripple of their frames. 'The fuel canister!' he thought delightedly, focusing all of his fire on the left guard’s massive cylindrical fuel tank.

What met his ears instead of an explosion was laughter though. The mini-gun wielder surged forward, the stone floor cracking under their steps. One of them, Nadir couldn't tell with the helmets, shouted, "Bad idea boy!"

They were hefting their mini-guns up. Nadir's eyes widened in shock, his heart felt like it was beating through his throat.

'Fight!' Arslan roared in the back of his head.

Just as the whirr of the mini-gun began to rise, Nadir released the end half of his rifle. Swinging his arm down, his ears rang at the clang of steel as he slammed the butt of his trigger into the base of the mini-gun. The force of his sudden blow sent the weapon up and over his head, its wielder swinging back.

"Y-!"

Nadir dragged his hand across his rifle and in three sharp clacks of metal it unfolded into a blade. Snarling he crashed the blade against the side of the mini-gun again as the pirate tried to take aim. They hopped back but Nadir shot forward. Drawing back his blade and with a frantic roar he drove the tip straight between the barrels as the guns spinning reached a loud whirr.

Jerking against the force Nadir grit his teeth and shouted high as he force his blade deeper until he heard the steel screech. A sharp fwoosh hit his ears and Nadir leapt back as the mini-gun's ammo ignited and the massive weapon exploded in its master’s hands.

"You son of a bitch!" The two fighters shouted.

He could hear the other one coming, too fast, the fire had stung the last time but-

The pirate before him shouted, their gloves in ruins they lurched forward with an arm drawn back.
A memory flashed in Nadir's mind and without thinking he jumped forward. Drawing his legs up and throwing his head back he slammed both feet against the pirate’s chest and slammed them into the wall. The speed of his jump sending him lurching forward and burying the pirate deeper in the stone.

The fire fwooshed and Nadir's fear kicked in. Kicking off from the black armoured pirate, Nadir threw himself back and into a roll as the jet stream of flames rushed by and instead collided with the pirate he'd embedded in the wall as they fell.

"Brother!" One of them roared as the wounded mini-gunner was blasted into another wall by the flames and slumped against the floor, steaming and smoke rising up from their singed form.

'Never freeze!'

Nadir shot off from the ground, dragging his sword behind him as he swerved around the corner. The flamethrower user bellowed at his charge and brandished their weapon. The tip of his blade scratched the melted floor and he watched as the spark flared into a flame.

Teeth grit, eyes wide and furious Nadir swung up and at the flames just now spilling from flamethrowers tip. His Aura was flooding out of his body and into his blade, it was radiating with a light pink light. Just as his sword's tip met the flames his Aura burst open like a surge of wind, bisecting the fire before it could touch him.

The flamethrower twitched but couldn't react fast enough as Nadir's sword crashed against their weapon and sent the flame spewing gun up with the force of his blow. Sword and arms seemingly out of control as his opponent's, Nadir almost double over as his swing neared its end. His sword crashed against the pirate's helmet and set it flying off, revealing a head of bluish hair and a feminine face that glared at him with a furious fire in her eyes.

Staggering back, only half noticing how her flamethrower was melting the roof Nadir swung his blade down and rushed forward. The pirate tried to drag her weapon down to meet his but she wasn't fast enough. With a forward strike he drove his sword into her gut. He felt it grind against her armour, Aura sending the force of his strike rippling away but Nadir was beyond fearing that now. Dragging his blade back he thrust forward against with a frantic shout, against and again, he struck a discordant chaotic patter across her chest and shoulders driving the pirate back.

"You shit!" She roared, slamming her gun barrel down on the top of his sword.

Knowing he had the merest second Nadir shot forward against, Aura pumping as madly as his blood and his blade burning hot in his hands as he dragged the blade across the pipeline and tore it asunder.

There was a singular moment of shock, not even a gasp, but both heard the spark, the fwooshing hiss of fire. Nadir slammed his sword into her side and swung, hurling his foe into the hallway to his right.

Kicking back he heard the blast a mere instant before he saw it as a wild wall of flames surging towards him. Drawing back his sword Nadir shouted as he swung!
An endless stream of purple laser fired rained down through the caverns. Blake desperately batted aside each one but they moved too fast and for what few she could deflect a dozen more were crashing against her frame. For what dozen she could dodge, there was always another dozen waiting wherever she leapt. Weiss's feeble attempts at cover kept failing her. The ground at Weiss's feet exploded and she was sent fleeing backwards.

Blake wanted to run to her, to jump in and fight, to run away or forward anywhere but-

Another blinding light, she slashed it away her sword, the faint sting of its energy still running through her Aura as she looked to Weiss. She glanced at Weiss who was kneeling and panting on the ground, only for a thicker beam to fly at her in that moment of distraction leaving her wide open. Slamming into her throat she was flung back as well, a stream of laser bolts striking her all over as she slammed into the torn up metal floor.

Everything stung! Her entire body quaked and shook and she couldn't even move.

"Give in Schnee and I'll let you keep your pet!"

Blake couldn't even make out Weiss's shriek, ear pressed to her head as she tried to scramble away from the blasts.

"No!?" He shouted, "Too bad!" and fired, unleashing a thick laser blast that hurtled towards her head and would take it clean off if she didn't move!

Blake's eyes widened as a sudden flood of Aura ran through her system, one final adrenaline rush in defiance of death. A calm ran through her entire being even as she shook from the pain but- She met his eyes and something in Blake faltered. 'It's ov -'

Before that thought could even finish that traitorous thought a flash of white blurred in front of her in a half crouch. Weiss's hair and coat flared in the wind as she met the laser blast with the tip of her blade and a howl of lightning tormented Blake's ears even as she lay stunned.

A blinding light flared for an instant and then vanished into nothing to reveal Weiss standing stock still, sword thrust out and panting. "That was, I.." she mumbled before spinning around and shouting, "Blake!" her eyes wide with worry.

Blake heard the click of the trigger before she saw the flash of laser fire leave the captain's sniper rifle. Without a thought she flung herself between Weiss and the blast, purple Aura surrounding her cleaver as he met the blast with the flat of her sword. With a furious grunt she sent the beam, into a wall that cracked and crumbled as the blast tore through it.

'His attack, it wasn't as strong as Adam's, how have I ..' Just as her eyes started rising up to spy his form, she bit her tongue and looked at Weiss as the awful sickly feeling that left her feet so heavy returned.

"You too?" Weiss murmured.

Grunting in affirmation Blake said, "I'm with you, I need you."

"I'm on your side, but I need you with me," Weiss answered.

Blake nodded to her friend, a small smile etching its way onto her firmly set features at the lack of
reservation in Weiss's gaze. With that image firmly planted in her mind Blake flung herself forward with an after image. The silver teal of Weiss's Glyphs rang out and she spied the girl in white at her side.

Another barrage of laser fire rained down towards them, but they didn't break off their charge. Blake blurred in front of Weiss and deflect a beam out of the way without breaking her stride. The next instant later Weiss followed suit with a flash of lighting. They weaved in, out and between each other their charge gaining speed.

The oppressive weight began to fade and Blake bared her blades and launched herself ahead of Weiss. She spied the tip of the captain’s gun but just as he seemed ready to fire in her face a light flared up at his feet and the pirate was flipped in the air. Only now did Blake notices the thick black pumps attached to his guns and the mass of metal he was standing on.

Flinging herself up Blake lashed out with Gambol Shroud. Her gun-blade swung through the air in a sharp blur and in an instant cut right through the thick pumps in an instant. She saw a faint trickle of purple Dust leak out as she flipped in the air and drove both legs into the man's chest. With another after image propelling her forward she torpoded him right through a Glyph and heard a satisfying crash as he exploded into the wall, rubble and dust falling down and crashing to the floor.

Flipping through the air and flinging herself back to Weiss's side Blake met the floor with a clang and drew back Gambol Shroud. Violet energy wavered around her cleaver in a sharp wave of radiated energy. She could hear Weiss's weapon making a similar hum. Both watched as the hole in the cave face and rubble exploded outward.

Cloak flaring wide, hat lost and covered in dirt and scratched, the pirate captain roared as he tore himself free in one mighty leap. Grasping a machete in his hands and baring his teeth in a battle cry, he shot down towards them and slashed...

Only to meet thin air as they darted around and behind him in a flash. Just as he spun around, Burn Dust rippling off his machete they attacked. Blake swung Gambol Shroud down like an executioner’s blade. Weiss thrust Myrtenaster, a gout of flames erupting from its tip.

Both blasts fused into one violet roaring sword beam that tore through the man's meagre blade with a snap of steel and colliding with his chest. Blake could barely see passed the blinding light as he was flung back with a terrified wail, his entire body limp as their attack rocketed him towards the caves exit.

Only in the last instant did he come to a crashing halt as Weiss summoned a Glyph at his back and the captain’s body was consumed in the violet blast so powerful it tore through Weiss's Glyph as well.

' One, two... three ,' Blake countered silently before the man’s back raised if only slightly and fell in a low shallow breath. Letting out a ragged breath of her own Blake's shoulders drooped and she smiled, a tingling sensation running through her entire body.

Only for her ears to twitch. Head swivelling around Weiss followed her lead and they saw a dark haired woman in an armour bodysuit break off from her attempt to sneak by on the wall to break for it and run for the stairs.

Letting out a low sigh Weiss flicked Myrtenaster in the woman's direction and with a hiss of ice her
feet were frozen and she was sent tumbling down the stairs, a curse punctuating every thump.

Letting Gambol Shroud's gun-blade hang from the wrist she tied it to, Blake reached up to put a hand on Weiss's shoulder.

Only for Weiss to spin around and pull her into a crushing hug.

Stilling for a moment a tremor ran through her being before she impulsively wrapped her arms around Weiss and pulled her smaller frame against her own.

"It’s OK, we won," She said, maybe to Weiss, maybe to herself, probably both.

"I know, just, I just needed that and-" Weiss stilled and Blade felt her ears twitch.

"Nadir!" They shouted in mutual realisation. Turning to the hole in the floor that marked the stairs they ran. 'Oh gods Arslan will murder us and then she'll -'

Blake's thoughts were cut off an armoured body was tossed up, followed by a second and then the now much more silent pirate they'd frozen, all landing in a pile of broken and partially melted steel and ice.

"Hey guys..." droned Nadir's weary voice as the boy lurched up the steps, "You won? That's cool," He slurred before slumping down on the floor and leaving his legs to dangle as he fell back onto the floor.

Blake could smell the smoke on him and his blue and white clothes were singed brown. Thankfully the worst physical damage he'd seemingly suffered was his ponytail falling out.

"We did, and it seems you won as well, congratulations," Weiss said.

"Thanks," Nadir answered, "Don't think I can move anymore... Oh," he suddenly stirred, almost sitting up only to be interrupted.

The captain's body twitched and the man let out a ragged spitting cough as he tried to push himself up on shaking limbs. "You stupid little bitches," He growled, desperately trying to stand as he staggered and half crawled towards them. "Once my crew gets here, you..." he gasped, "You'll be in for a world of-"

"Oh shut up!" Weiss snapped, dress-coat flaring as she raised up her heel and slammed it into the man’s forehead with a crack that sent him smacking into the ground clutching his face.

"The fuck! Aaahh! This fucking hurts you stupid shits!" He raged. "How did you? How did you get passed my Semblance!?" He demanded, one hand still covering his face but the other reaching out to them even as it shook as if he could pull answers from this air.

Blake wanted to hiss and curse and slam his head into the ground until he passed out and never said another damned word again. Tearing her eyes from him thought she simply said, "You may have tried toying with our minds but that's meaningless when we're together. We were stronger than could ever be."

"Aww!" Came a high and amused voice from the stairwell.
"Hah, that’s it!" The captain shouted, "Blur get in here-" The captain's manic smile faded as a bulky soldier in a ruined uniform was hurled up through the stair well and met the floor with a small 'boom'. He was quickly followed by a slight man with silver hair in a ruined bodysuit and at least three other similarly tattered pirates before Yang and Arslan strode into the hall. Yang looking very pleased with herself and looking around like she owned the place.

The smiling blonde looked at them and before Blake or Weiss could escape they found themselves drawn into one of her hyper heated hugs as Yang practically bounced with energy. "I heard the end of the fight even down there, and that line, aw you guys are so cool!" She said.

Blake could only blush, trying to separate her conscious mind from her body and maybe come back sometime never.

"That's right," Nadir said, "The others are here, they were just dragging some pirates behind them."

"I told you to let us help move you," Arslan said, as her team clustered around Nadir while Ruby ran over to them and Blake found herself and Weiss on the end of a second hug.

"Yeah sorry," Nadir said tiredly, "But hey I won, and listened to your advice!"

"I know, you did amazingly well," Arslan said quietly, though not so quietly Blake couldn't hear the pride in her voice.

"Wha... what!?" The captain spluttered.

All eyes turned to him and it was Ruby who spoke first with a simple, "You lost, that's what."

The captains eyes, filled with hatred turned on her and he looked ready to shout.

Only to get clonked on the back of the head by Reese who said, "His voice was annoying."

Clapping her hands and looking over the sight of their battle Yang said, "Well that's a wrap I guess. We stopped the Grimm incursion at the base of the fortress."

"The what?" Weiss said mutely.

"Oh yeah some Grimm broke in and attacked the pirates, we dealt with it though," Ruby said from her position before Blake and Weiss.

"And now," Arslan continued, "All the pirates are either unconscious, injured or have surrendered. For as long as we can hold it or until we call for back up the base is ours."

"It’s clear what we must do," Yang said, her words serious and sombre, before her smirk became evident as she said, "become pirates!"

"Yang!" Ruby said.

"Kidding, kidding!" Yang said, waving her hands as if to fend of Ruby's words. She then glanced at ABRN and said, "Would it be OK if we took some Bullhead parts though? We ah, kinda need 'em."

Shrugging Arslan said, "No skin off our backs, many of them are from Haven and will be
repossessed anyway. Besides, unless you all want credit I suppose we can consider it your compensation?"

Grinning up a storm Yang said, "Awesome, let’s not waste any time then!"

——

Epilogue!

It hadn’t taken long for the two teams to agree to a one hour 'grace period' in which the ABRN would help them gather supplies so that the Knights Errant could leave once their friends called in Haven for back up. Of course, with eight people working around the clock and the Knights Errant very used to scavenging, it would hardly take all that long even with Ruby and Yang on the lookout for part that could help create a new and improved Ember Celica.

"Hehe, we'd probably have already left if Yang and Reese didn't want to look at the laser engine that captain was using for his guns ," Ruby thought. Heck, upon seeing the altered laser cannon engine she'd practically salivated on the machine. It was so, so sad that such a thing of beauty had been in the hands of a rapscallion. Ruby grinned at the thought of everything she'd picked up from cracking that baby open.

Of course she wasn't the only one seeking out some extra special equipment, Yang had also made it a point to tear out more than a little of the Specialist airship's engine and taken some of the battleship's jets, going off on a tangent about speed and weight differentiation Ruby could only partially follow.

Now six of their eight person squad were gathered in the armoury and were all leaning, sitting or otherwise loafing around on a boxes of supplies and ship parts. Ruby herself was perched upon a wing laid out on the ground with Reese, while Weiss and Blake sat against the wall, Nadir was dozing atop a crates worth of supplies while Bolin leaned against a nearby rock wall.

Together they were watching over the beaten pirates. Most were unconscious or groaning on the ground form their injuries, with only a few who'd missed the combat by hiding and surrendering hanging off to the side. While not technically bound anything resembling armour or weaponry had been taken and those who had surrendered were under constant watch well away from their few waking and lucid pirates who they'd beaten down that now scowled at the floor.

No one had let the leaders wake up yet.

At the sound of Bolin's tapping foot on the wall and the increasingly evident twitch on Weiss and Blake's brows Ruby suddenly said. "So what are you guys gonna do once this is over?"

"Well," Reese said, as if mulling it over for a moment as she placed a finger to her chin. "I think we'll head home, shower, sleep, that kinda thing."

"She meant after that," Bolin cut in, head lolling from side to side.

"Oh yeah," Reese said, smiling as she slapped one fist into her palm. "We'll be heading off for the Vytal Tournament in a week or two, right when the next semester starts!"

"Wait, you were taking missions during semester break?" Weiss asked.

Tisking Bolin said, "Arslan insisted, and how long until she and Yang get here?" Bolin groaned,
thumping his head against the rock wall.

"Sooner than you might think Bolin," came Yang's jubilant voice as she re-entered the chamber from the stairwell.

Ruby stared wide eyed as Yang strutted passed their group with a crate full of liberated Dust, clothes and small engine parts in her arms. That was not what was odd though. What stood out was the sharp angled hat with a skull on it that she wore on her head.

Grinning at Ruby Yang's placed down one of her crates, hand shooting into it and she pulled out a matching red hat that she plopped onto her head. "I found pirate hats," the blonde said cheerfully, marching away.

"Eeh!" Ruby squeaked happily as she re-positioned her hat in a suitably jaunty way only to hear the rest of ABRN, save their leader, gasp.

Spinning around Ruby mimicked the ABR trio at the sight.

It was Arslan, and just like Yang she was carrying a crate of liberated provisions, except she now wore a set of massive hoop earnings, had a bandanna tied around her arm and a pirate hat on her head.

Glancing at them her resolve almost seemed to waver for a moment before her usual stern expression reasserted itself and Arslan merely said, "She found pirate hats," and marched away.

The even light shone down on Yang's head as she stood atop the storage crate, the metal clanking under her steps before she knelt down, taking what looked like a four part steel claw fused with a plunger and pressed it down against the white metal lid and tapped her ear piece and said, "We're locked on."

"Is it fastened?" Blake's voice asked over the earpiece from her place inside the cockpit.

"I wouldn't be calling if it wasn't," Yang said, resisting the urge to turn around and search for Ruby at the sound of Crescent Roses gun fire, only, because her sister was laughing.

"I just wanted to make sure," Blake said neutrally, too neutrally... "None of us want a repeat of that Dust container travesty."

"Oh hah hah," Yang said, "You know that wasn't my fault."

"Keep telling yourself that," Weiss cut in over the Scroll call.

"You guys suck!" Yang groaned, only stopping when she heard the claw hum and then fasten itself to the lid with a heavy clunk as it magnetised to the surface then dug its claws into the waiting slot. Throwing back her hair Yang called, "Looks like we're all hooked up here!" before jumping down do the grassy islands surface and kicking up a small mass of dust left over from their explosive entrance into the looming pirates base not twenty feet away.

Yang spun around and made her way passed the metal cable towards their most recently stolen
Bullhead as Ruby and ABRN slipped from the brush and made their way over to the ship as well. Just as Blake came to stand at the open deck, Arslan said, "We just cleared out the last of the Grimm in this area and we have back up scheduled to be here in less than an hour." For a moment the blonde's olive eyes actually shifted away from meeting Yang's own before coming back in full force as Arslan held out her hand and said, "Looks like this is where we part ways, Knights Errant."

"Yeah, it does," Yang said, clasping Arslan's hand in her own and squeezing tightly.

"Aw, I'll miss you guys," Ruby said, sulkily hugging Crescent Rose to her chest.

Reese just looked at her quizzically a moment before marching up and pulling Ruby into a hug. "Hugs are cool," she said, as Ruby returned the gesture.

"Yeah this was," Nadir said, chuckling, "an experience."

"You'll get used to it," Blake said.

"That's probably what he's afraid of," Bolin chuckled.

"We'll be on the watch for your fights at the Vytal Festival, good luck to you," Weiss said.

"Thank you," Arslan said, not having yet released Yang's hand, though Yang was similarly refusing as their grasp tightened and tightened as Arslan continued, voice growing rougher. "Good luck with wherever your journey takes you next, and I hope we can work together again," she finished with a grunt. Their hands were shaking now. "Go once your ship's done, and if you ever want to team up again just call."

Grinning, Yang let her Aura continue to flood her hand, the air around their impromptu contest warping from the heat as she said, "Wouldn't miss a chance for another team up, or a throw down, next time I'll have weapons too."

"Baring her teeth and grinning Arslan said, "I'll have to increase our training regime then."

"Oh gods!" Nadir groaned.

"If you two are done measuring your..." Weiss began, before finally settling on, "egos?"

"Never," Yang cut in.

"We really should go," she finished with a sigh.

Arslan was the first to pull away, a muted sigh escaping her lips, "Very well, you do have reason to leave, good luck again, all of you."

"And to you as well!" Yang cheered, shooting in for a genuinely friendly hug at Arslan's side before running around ABRN and ruffling the other team’s hair before leaping into their Bullhead with her team as Blake revved up the engine.

Waving down as the Haven teemed waved back they called, "We'll see you guys again, bet on it!" before the ship's engines flared and they shot off, dragging the crate of engine supplies into the air behind them.
As the Knights Errant disappeared Arslan let a measured grin slip onto her features as she gestured for her team to follow her back through the gaping hole she and Yang had torn open in the base so they could return to their guard work until back up arrived.

"You know," Nadir said, eyes shifting worriedly, "they said they didn't want any attention, but the pirates will know other people helped us."

Snapping his fingers, Bolin said, "Yeah and Weiss has like, Schnee Glyphs you can't exactly cover that up."

"Do you have a plan?" Reese asked her simply.

"I do," Arslan said, coming to a stop a little ways before the hole in the mountain's surface, close enough to hear any movements on the pirates' part emanating up, but not positioned so that her words would easily filter down. "The facts of the matter are simple, we met a team of independent Huntresses whom we needed the assistance of in resolving this pirate situation, they wanted to get their stolen ship and equipment back from the pirates after their camp was raided but left due obligations to obligations in Vale. Provided we get a few specifics straight this story should carry well enough, most of the pirates started out as village dwellers, not connected enough to know of Weiss or Blake, and Ruby and Yang are hardly household names, 'Yet' she thought to herself. "And the Schnee Semblance is not the only one that utilise something similar to Glyphs."

Looking towards the horizon where the Knights Errant had flown, Arslan sent her team a half lidded look of amusement as she shrugged, "Besides, a Schnee, working with an accused Faunus and two unknown Huntresses? Who would believe such an absurd story when it comes from the mouths of pirates?"

"Hah, yeah," Bolin said, "Next they'll be saying Yang and Ruby are also the kids of some legendary super team of Hunters and have magic powers or some cr-" he stalled at Arslan's glare and amended, "Crud."

"Indeed, besides it'll be hard enough to get a straight story out of all the pirates, so long as we're reasonably consistent things will hopefully work out," Arslan said, knowing too well to make any promises as to that fact.

"Still," Reese huffed, "They were fun, I hope we run into them again and they don't die out here."

"Aw come on, they were really tough!" Nadir said, patting Reese on the shoulder.

"They were," Arslan said, "And as to seeing them again, well, I may have some ideas."

Yang pulled away from her welding, a wide grin on her lips at the newly attached wing on their Stardust. "All right guys, take five!" She shouted, and everyone let out a relieved sigh, letting rope bindings and Glyphs meant to keep the wing up worked, slack and fade.

Jumping from the roof of Stardust Yang landed against the cement floor with a clap when-
"So how long will those repairs take?" Came a rough, sharp voice.

"Oh another week or... so..." Yang's voice trailed off as the voice actually registered and her face split into a massive grin as she spied Arslan and her team framed by the afternoon sunlight at their warehouses door. "Arslan, and the assorted rugrats!" She cheered, rushing towards her blonde.

"Hey!" Bolin barked, which Yang happily ignored as she clasped Arslan's hand in a tight grip and grinned down at her fellow fist fighter as the squeezed tighter and tighter.

"Reese, Bolin!" Ruby cheered, sweeping the duo into a hug and bring a smile and a laugh to them respectively as they answered, "Ruby!"

"Nadir," Blake said, nodding to the pink haired gunner.

"A pleasure as always," Weiss said coolly, though there was a tiny smile on her lips.

"Hey again guys," Nadir, greeted rubbing his neck but standing more confidently than Ruby thought she'd ever seen him as she pulled away from Reese and Bolin.

Jumping excitedly in place Ruby looked at ABRN, all cleanly dressed and fresh looking with travelling packs on their backs and asked, "What are you guys doing here?"

Arslan was the first to answered, "Once the pirates were locked away -- your cover is safe, by the way," she added with a nod towards Blake and Weiss, the former of whom wasn't even bothered to hide her face at this point. ""We were called back to Haven. We gave our report and were offered the chance to rest, or join a temporary village protection mission while Haven stabilises the regions affected by the pirate scourge."

Bolin shrugged widely and grinned, "We knew Shorleight was in good hands, but we couldn't exactly tell them that."

"And we thought you guys might like some company!" Reese said, a wide grin on her lips as she held up her Scroll and hover board.

Nadir looked away for a moment, "I am a bit worried about the other towns though..."

"It's nothing to be concerned with Nadir," Arslan said, "They'll have all the volunteers they need regardless of what we did, this just ensures Shorelight is, extra safe, as are the Knights Errant."

Grinning Nadir chuckled and said, "Fair point, heh, and I guess this isn't the only town with two teams, SSSN and CMSN got stuck together as well."

"Their leader ran off to Vacuo right when term ended," Bolin clarified, "so his team have to act as support for CMSN, poor Neptune, those ladies will eat him alive."

"So you guys are here for like a week? Two?" Yang asked, and Ruby could already feel the temperature rising as she and Arslan's Aura's subtly flared and kicked up a small ethereal breeze.

"Indeed, two weeks In fact. Long enough for Mistral to arrange an official protection program and plenty of time for you to fix your ship, and maybe spar in between," Arslan said with a toothy smile.
"This," Ruby said, voice rising high, "is going to be the best slumber party ever!"

Chapter End Notes

Hello again! Thanks for sticking with the Knights Errant, I hope this arc has been an enjoyable read and if you have any critique, questions or comments please don't be shy. As always thanks go out to Person With Many Aliases for beta reading and thank everyone who has commented, faved, liked and followed.

Looking back on it, I could have made this a tighter arc, and changing around a few scenes such as Yang V Arslan, could have made the story make more sense, thanks to everyone who pointed that and other such issues out.

I can't say when or if I'll be coming back to this story, but I just want to thank everyone again for reading. Welp, laters! :D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!