A wedding sets off a cascade of events no one could have predicted. Past pains are dug up and worries about the future must be overcome.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
In its first three years, Solstice Modeling grew from nothing to a powerhouse. With Winter calling the shots and Velvet snapping the pictures, the company went on to do shoots for almost every major clothing company in Vale and many beyond. Nora, Yang, Winter and Blake were regular models, with Pyrrha, Sun, Glynda and Raven joining them when time and circumstance permitted. Even Velvet took a place in front of the camera from time to time. The company developed a strong enough reputation for mainstream work that Winter even felt comfortable enough to allow Yang and Nora to pose for the artistic nudes they never stopped asking to shoot.

Solstice Modeling was sometimes under threat. Winter's father would not forgive her departure, and he did everything he could to force her return. Lawsuits targeting the company or Winter herself were a frequent distraction, but Winter's lawyers were just as good as his. Jacques Schnee purchased and promoted a modeling company of his own to compete, and Winter countered by representing his competition. Yang and some of the others were a bit concerned by the ongoing battle, but Winter seemed to relish the chance to further defy her father and make his life difficult.

Pyrrha got her doctorate, joining Glynda as a full-fledged psychologist. Slowly she began taking on many of Glynda's patients as Glynda turned her focus from regular appointments to volunteer work. Raven got a job as a bartender, one of the many skills she had picked up in her years of drifting. Sun continued running his parkour gym, but had less time to dedicate to it as Solstice Modeling's steady growth meant he was needed more and more often.

On the personal front, the couples stayed together, only growing closer with the passage of time. Sun, the one single in the group, went through a series of short-lived relationships that never amounted to anything. He still had plenty of fun though, and did not seem overly concerned by his
lack of long-term companionship. With the help of lovers and friends, the group healed, never
forgetting their departed loved ones but coming to terms with their losses. Eventually it got to the
point where the support group was just an excuse for everyone to hang out. After a few weeks of
that, they decided just having a night out was more appropriate, and it was officially disbanded.

Blake posed near the cliff’s edge, her light, floral-patterned blouse blowing in the breeze. Velvet
snapped shot after shot. The angle of the sun was perfect, the direction of the wind was perfect,
Blake was perfect. The cliff overlooked a verdant forest, and along with the bright hues of Blake's
attire it all made for a vibrant mix of color, of natural and human beauty. As she often did in such
situations, Velvet began to tear up as she continued taking pictures. The beauty and perfection filled
her with overwhelming emotions and brought happy memories, both recent and distant, to the
surface.

"You alright Velvs?" Blake asked as Velvet stopped snapping pictures.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Velvet sniffled. "You know how I get." She started digging around in her case.
"Winter said she wants me to take few more shots with another lens, then we're done." She sighed.
"I wish it didn't have to end."

Velvet became vaguely aware of Yang doing something nearby. She looked up just in time to see
Blake catch a small object, apparently tossed to her by Yang. "Nice catch Blakey." Yang laughed.
"And you were worried it would go off the cliff."

"Wouldn't you be?" Blake snapped back.

"Have fun." Yang said before walking away.

"Where's she going?" Velvet asked. "What are you two up to?" Blake hid the object in her hand and
took a few steps towards Velvet. She dropped to a knee. Velvet at first thought she tripped, but it
looked far too intentional for that. "Blake…"

Blake looked up, meeting Velvet's gaze, and smiled. She held out her hand, revealing a tiny box
containing a sparkling ring. "Well Velvs, will you marry me?" Blake asked.

Velvet froze in place, her mouth agape. Slowly she reached for her camera, lifted it to her eye and
snapped a picture of Blake. "Y-yes!" She stammered. She rushed forward and allowed Blake to slip
the ring onto her finger.

"That was easier than I was expecting." Blake laughed.

"I...I...I…" Velvet stuttered.

"I love you too." Blake said, wrapping Velvet in a tender embrace. "So, shall we celebrate?"

"Celebrate?" Velvet gasped.

Blake smirked. "There's a lovely little campsite setup over there, and Yang took off so we're the only
people around for miles."

The autumn proposal led to a spring wedding. Winter had thrown herself into the planning even
before the proposal itself, and it was a role she relished. When Blake and Velvet decided they
wanted to have a Gothic-themed wedding - they liked the aesthetic - Winter was all over it. In days she located and booked a suitable venue - an old manor a few hours south of Vale, it fit the Gothic theme and was outfitted with a large ballroom that could accommodate the reception or even the wedding itself if the need arose - and presented the couple with a list of clothing companies experienced in producing the desired styles. The catering, entertainment and other logistical considerations were all taken care of swiftly. Winter even paid for the whole thing. All that remained was a three month wait, and the wedding itself. It was decided that, weather permitting, the wedding would be held outside, in a beautiful garden on the manor grounds.

The weather was beautiful, blue skies with some puffy white clouds, and just the slightest breeze. Blake stood at the altar wearing an elaborate tuxedo and a top hat. Her Best Woman - Pyrrha - stood beside her wearing a slightly simpler suit, the same as the groomsmen - Nora and Sun. Sun put his own spin on the outfit by leaving it completely unbuttoned, exposing his abs, and no one even questioned it. Across from the group, the bridesmaids - Glynda, Yang and Raven - wore matching Gothic dresses with black habit-like veils. Clad in a suit that resembled a military uniform, Winter walked Velvet down the aisle. The bride wore a more complex version of the dress the bridesmaids wore. It was a small ceremony, with only about a dozen guests beyond the main party.

Velvet stepped to Blake's side and they held hands, meeting one another's gaze as the priest spoke. "Into this union, Blake Belladonna and Velvet Scarlatina now come to be joined." The priest said. "If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be wed, speak now or forever hold your peace."

"I object on the grounds that an ass that good should never be married away!" Nora shouted, crouching and gesturing toward Blake's behind.

"I concur!" Yang cheered.

A wave of chuckles rose from the crowd as Pyrrha and Glynda released a collective groan. "Objection ignored." Blake declared. "My ass is hers now."

The rest of the wedding proceeded quickly and without incident. Fairly standard vows were made, "I do's" were said, rings were exchanged and it was all sealed with a kiss. Then it was into the manor where the party would really begin. Some formalities, pictures being one, had to be taken care of before things got off the ground, and most of the attendees were left to wait as the newlyweds posed for a series of photos. Glynda and Pyrrha ended up alone at their table, their respective dates having wandered off.

"Where did Nora run off to?" Glynda asked.

"She was hungry so…" Pyrrha started. She turned her head to see Nora approaching. "Here she is."

Nora slid in between Pyrrha and Glynda with a large plate of snacks in hand. In addition to various pastries was a large slice of lavishly decorated cake with a sizable bite taken out. Nora took another bite as Pyrrha and Glynda stared at her aghast. "Catering's great!" Nora cheered. She did not get the response she was expecting. "What?"

"Nora...that's the wedding cake." Glynda gasped.

"Is that a big deal?" Nora asked. "A cake's a cake."

"Oh no...Nora...it's a big tradition that the newlyweds cut the cake!" Pyrrha shouted.

"Uh...I…" Nora struggled. She turned to see Blake and Velvet approaching, strained looks on their
faces, and froze. "God Blake, Velvet, I'm so sorry I didn't know! Oh God…” Blake and Velvet burst out laughing, leaving Nora confused and scared. "Wha-what?"

"It's okay Nora, it's not the real cake." Blake chuckled.

"Oh, okay." Nora breathed a sigh of relief. She took another large bite of cake.

"That's the stunt double." Velvet laughed. "Winter's idea. Even she knows not to leave something edible out when Nora's around."

"It was my idea to drug it though." Blake smirked.

Nora paused mid-bite. "Drugged?" Pyrrha gasped.

"Just a mild sedative." Blake explained. "Our little cake thief will be a little drowsy but otherwise perfectly fine."

Nora shrugged and continued eating. She even went back for seconds. Sedatives or not, it was good cake. Pyrrha tried to stop her but knew it was a losing battle. No one could stand between Nora and her sweets. The real cake was wheeled out and more pictures taken. With that out of the way, Blake, Pyrrha and Nora ditched their suit-jackets. Velvet removed her skirt, only to reveal a smaller, lighter and more practical version beneath. Winter and Glynda took off their veils, but Yang and Raven kept theirs. Yang said it made her "feel like a sexy nun" and Raven was already too drunk to care.

The sedatives apparently did their job as Nora sat silently, even as the party switched from tradition wedding reception to a rave. The lights were turned down, glowsticks and glow-jewelry were handed out, and the music ramped up. Winter joined Raven in extreme inebriation, with Velvet becoming a bit tipsy as well. Pyrrha and Nora sat on the sidelines while the others danced, Pyrrha slightly concerned by her partner's out-of-character behavior. Rather than joining in, Nora sat there with a dreamy look on her face as she watched Sun dance his little heart out. He had shed his suit jacket and the shirt beneath, and was now decked out in as much glow-jewelry as could be affixed to him. Slick with sweat, Sun danced vigorously to the heavy beat, a blur of neon colors in the darkness.

Sun seemed to have limitless energy but others tired, with Glynda, Blake and Velvet joining Pyrrha and Nora at their seats. "Enjoying yourselves?" Glynda asked.

"Not as much as Sun apparently." Pyrrha observed.

"Oh yeah, Sage spiked his drink with Dust." Blake said.

"He's shiny!" Nora squealed.

"Sage brought Dust to your wedding?!" Glynda gasped.

"He cleared it with us beforehand." Blake explained, accompanied by a nod of agreement from Velvet. "He wanted Sun to lighten up a little and cut loose. Apparently he used to use it a lot before Neptune died."

"This is reckless." Glynda complained. "His health…"

"I think it's sweet." Blake cut her off. "And we're all here to keep an eye on him. Scarlet is making sure he drinks enough water, and the glowy stuff will keep everyone out of his way."

"Ugh, fine." Glynda sighed. "I need another drink...or several." She walked over to the bar with a
"So, Blake, Velvet, what do you have planned for the future?" Pyrrha asked.

"We've been discussing ideas for some time, and we've settled on one thing." Blake started.

"We want to adopt!" Velvet finished for her.

"Ooh!" Nora cheered, apparently breaking from her stupor. "Kids are the future! You'll make great moms!"

"Thanks Nora." Velvet said. "We hope we are."

"Dibs on babysitting!" Nora yelled.

"You'll have to fight over that with Yang." Blake laughed.

The rave continued but Sun soon crashed. He was exhausted, barely able to stand on his own, so Sage and Scarlet took him to the nearby hotel where the guests were staying. With the life of the party gone, most of the others departed as well, leaving only the key participants behind. Nora livened up and danced with Pyrrha for a while, but the real show was on the sidelines. Winter, finally free of the responsibility of planning the wedding and making sure it went off without a hitch, got incredibly drunk. Raven was plastered as well, and the pair started making out passionately.

"You can't be fucking serious." Yang groaned.

"Raven and I are going to have words later." Glynda grumbled.

"Maybe we should make out, you know, for solidarity." Yang suggested. Glynda met the proposition with a blank stare. "Okay, fine, sure…"

Without warning, Glynda grabbed the sides of Yang's face and kissed her deeply.

"Whoo yeah!" Nora cheered. "Go Glynda!"

"Aw." Pyrrha said.

"Nice." Blake laughed.

Glynda broke away from a heavily flushed and panting Yang. "Satisfied?" She asked.

"Guh." Yang managed, standing there dumbfounded.

"Good." Glynda said with a smirk.

"Hey Glynda, where's ours?" Nora asked.

Fuck it, I'm not drunk but I can pass off the blame. Glynda thought. She strode over to Nora, pulling her into a hungry kiss. Nora squealed and giggled when Glynda pulled away and moved on to Pyrrha who melted into Glynda's gentle embrace. After a slow and loving kiss, Glynda pecked Pyrrha on the temple and moved on once more, allowing Pyrrha to collapse into a nearby chair.

Glynda turned to Blake who grinned. "I don't remember hiring a cougar for entertainment." Blake joked. Glynda pulled both Blake and Velvet close. She kissed Blake first, then Velvet who fell into Blake's arms. Now it was time to deal with Raven. She had watched the whole scene and now sat there slackjawed as Winter continued to kiss down her throat, entirely oblivious of what was
happening around her.

Glynda grabbed Raven and Yang Winter, pulling them apart. Winter turned around and was very confused. "Yang?" She gasped. "But I was just." She turned back and forth, looking at Raven and Yang. "Two Yongs? Jackpot!" She giggled and began kissing her intended target. Glynda looped her arm around Raven, leading her off into the manor for a little fun of their own.

"Well...that happened." Pyrrha sighed.

"Guh." Velvet managed.

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Early the next morning Blake and Velvet departed for their honeymoon. They would take a round-the-world cruise with stops in many major cities and tourist havens. Blake had always wanted to travel the world but had been hamstrung by a fear of flying she could not seem to shake. Even as Solstice Modeling went worldwide, Blake had remained limited to places to which she could drive, ride a train, or take a ferry. The cruise would be a fine workaround until Glynda and Pyrrha could help her through her phobia.

Most of the others chose to go out for breakfast, but Pyrrha and Nora decided to stick to the free breakfast on offer at the hotel. They had had an exhausting night of sex, followed by a morning of shower sex, and neither was feeling like going anywhere. The breakfast setup in the hotel was quite good anyway. A wide selection of pastries was the centerpiece, but there were also pancake and waffle makers, along with a variety of juices. Offered all the pancakes she could eat, there was no question what Nora's choice would be.

Pyrrha made a waffle and sat down at an empty table. As she looked around she noticed that all the tables were empty actually. It was not tourist season and the rest of the wedding guests had gone out or slept in, leaving Pyrrha and Nora alone in the breakfast bar. Pyrrha worried that such freedom would lead to Nora overeating. With no line and no limits she could easily scarf down enough to make herself sick. That worry made it all the more surprising when she sat down with a pair of pancakes, and after applying liberal amounts of syrup, played with them more than ate them. The pancakes were not particularly large and if Nora wanted to, she was more than capable of inhaling them in seconds.

"Is something wrong?" Pyrrha asked. "Are they not good?"

"No, they're great." Nora replied, taking a small bite like a normal human being.

"So what's up?" Pyrrha pressed, taking a bite of her waffle.

"I want your babies!" Nora blurted out.

Pyrrha gasped and began choking on her food. A few coughs and some orange juice cleared the blockage and she set about trying to catch her breath. "Ah...Nora...I don't think that's quite how it works." Pyrrha finally managed.

"I know." Nora sighed. "I know, but I want kids."

"You're serious?" Pyrrha asked.

Nora cast her gaze down at the floor and nodded. "Yeah...I've thought about it a lot." She replied. "Me and Ren...we talked a lot about having kids. That was one of the reasons we bought a house. He just...he wanted to wait, get settled in a bit...you know…" She sniffled. "I know it's not exactly
the same, but I still want to have kids."

"Why bring it up now?" Pyrrha asked.

"Last night Blake and Velvet said they were going to adopt...it just got me thinking about it again." Nora answered. "I've thought about it before, lots of times, but now for them it's so real."

"Okay, we'll visit an orphanage or talk to an adoption…" Pyrrha started.

"No, I want it to be my baby." Nora cut her off. "I want the feeling...the connection...of being a real mother."

"Oh...that's not so hard." Pyrrha said. "We can go to the sperm bank and…"

"No, no." Nora shook her head. "I don't want the father to be some random guy I've never met."

"So then how…" Pyrrha trailed off.

"Sun." Nora said.

"Wha…” Pyrrha struggled.

"I want Sun to be the father." Nora declared. "And I want him to do it naturally."

"You mean…” Pyrrha gasped.

"Yep." Nora confirmed. "But I...if you're not okay with it I can…"

"No, don't rule it out just yet." Pyrrha said. "It sounds like you've given it a lot of thought. I really haven't."

"Sun is perfect for this." Nora said. "He's my best friend, we both trust him, he's super nice and good with kids, and...I mean look at him. Together we'll make little super heroes."

"That's...I'm having a hard time arguing with this." Pyrrha admitted. "I'm just...not entirely comfortable with the idea of you having sex with someone else. It's not that I don't trust you or him, I just...I guess I'm a little jealous."

"You can be there if you want." Pyrrha suggested. "We could make it a three-way."

"And I'm not entirely comfortable with that either." Pyrrha sighed. "But if this makes you happy, I'll support you. Have you talked to Sun about it?"

"God no." Nora gasped. "I don't want to scare him away." She sighed. "I also don't want him to laugh in my face."

"Nora...you wouldn't scare him off, and I'm sure he wouldn't laugh if he knows you're serious." Pyrrha encouraged. "Before we do anything else we need to know if he's okay with it. If not, there's no point worrying about any of it."

"Okay, so how should we ask him?" Nora asked.

"How about we invite him to lunch?" Pyrrha asked. "Or maybe dinner. He had a rough night…"
Pyrrha knocked on the door to the hotel room. After a few seconds it opened to reveal Glynda. "Oh, hello Pyrrha." Glynda smiled.

"Hi Glynda." Pyrrha said. "Do you have a few minutes to talk?"

"Of course." Glynda replied. She gestured into the room. "Come in, come in."

"Is Raven here?" Pyrrha asked. "I'd like to talk to her too."

"Over here." Raven called with a wave from the couch. Pyrrha sat down beside Raven and Glynda sat down beside her. "What's up hon?"

"It's about Nora." Pyrrha replied.

"Oh, where is she?" Raven asked.

"Is she okay?" Glynda asked. "The sedatives wore off, didn't they?"

"Wha...oh, there were no sedatives." Pyrrha laughed. "Blake was joking. It was just the placebo effect. She had a few too many pancakes for breakfast and she's sleeping it off."

"I take it this isn't about her stomach ache." Glynda observed.

"No, this is something a lot more...more..." Pyrrha struggled. She let out a long breath and slumped on the couch. Raven draped an arm around her while Glynda took her hand.

"What happened?" Glynda asked.

"Nora...Nora wants a child." Pyrrha sighed.

"Well, I certainly wasn't expecting that." Glynda said.

"Neither was I." Pyrrha shook her head. "A-and to be honest, I'm not opposed to the idea. It was certainly a little out of the blue, but Nora has never asked much of me. She has given me so much these past few years."

"What's the issue then?" Raven asked.

"Nora wants to do things naturally." Pyrrha explained. "She wants to carry, she wants to know the father, and she doesn't want to be artificially inseminated."

"And considering the people we know she knows, there's only one person she could have in mind." Raven noted.

"Yes, Nora wants Sun to father her child." Pyrrha confirmed. "And...I'm having difficulty arguing against it."

"Sun is a good man." Glynda declared.

"Nora's closest friend, besides Yang maybe." Pyrrha nodded. "And we have entrusted him with her
care many times, both before and after our relationship began. A good man, a healthy individual, he would make a good father...but I just...I don't know how to feel."

"How does Sun feel about this?" Raven asked.

"We haven't spoken about it yet." Pyrrha admitted. "I plan to as soon as possible, but he's still recovering from last night."

"Take your time Pyrrha." Glynda suggested. "This is a big move, for all of you. You should all be completely comfortable with this, every step of the way."

"I want to make Nora happy Glynda." Pyrrha sighed. "I know she already is, but before everything went wrong, she had another life ahead of her, a marriage, a man she loved, a man who could give her a child. Losing all that hurt her more deeply than any therapy can reach. If I can make her just that much happier by doing this for her, by helping her achieve her dreams, I will, even if I'm a little uncomfortable with some aspects of the situation."

"Whatever happens, whatever you decide, I will support you." Glynda declared.

"I'll do my best to help however I can." Raven promised. "I know my experience has been far from ideal, but maybe you can learn from my mistakes."

"Thank you, both of you." Pyrrha smiled. "This has just been new and confusing and I just needed to talk about it, to get it out of my head."

Glynda and Raven hugged Pyrrha from either side, Glynda kissing her on the temple. "We're a family Pyrrha, and we love you." Glynda said. "No matter what, we'll always be here for you, Nora too, and should it come to pass, even Sun."

Pyrrha and Nora were eager to speak to Sun, but even by dinner he was still too out of it for a serious discussion. It would have to wait another day. Most of the wedding guests caught a late night flight back to Vale. They were all on the same flight, but Nora was basically comatose after midnight and Sun slept the whole way as well. Yang and Winter were not on the flight, the pair heading to Mistral instead for some of what Yang termed "Winter's business stuff." Pyrrha had wanted to discuss things with them as well, but it would have to wait.

Despite Nora being her usual hyper self by dawn, Pyrrha slept in a while, finally waking mid-morning. After a shower and getting dressed she made the call that had her so nervous. She dialed up Sun and waited as it rang, secretly hoping he would still be too hungover to answer. "Yo Pyrrha." Sun answered after a little longer than usual.

"Sun, how are you feeling today?" Pyrrha asked.

"Much better." Sun replied. "I'm still a little achy but I think the hangover from hell is over. Sage mixed up some health shake thingy, tasted like shit but it helped for whatever reason."

"That's grand!" Pyrrha cheered. "Do you have any lunch plans?"

"Nah, nothin'." Sun answered. "Why?"

"Nora and I have something we'd like to discuss, and it's best done in person." Pyrrha explained.

"Ah, sure, okay." Sun said. "Uh...where did you have in mind?"
"That little coffee shop on the boardwalk." Pyrrha replied.

"Amber's?" Sun asked.

"Yes." Pyrrha confirmed. "They make lovely slices, and their chicken wraps are to die for."

"Sounds like a plan." Sun agreed. "What time?"

"We'll be there by one, so no pressure." Pyrrha answered.

"Alright, see you then." Sun said.

"See you later." Pyrrha said. "Bye." She ended the call and took a deep breath. She gazed out the window and spotted Nora meditating in the gazebo. It was really happening.

Pyrrha and Nora arrived early, securing a table and ordering drinks as they waited. Sun showed up exactly on time and the trio ordered lunch, chicken wraps for Pyrrha and Nora, and a toasted sandwich for Sun. "So what's up?" Sun asked.

"You were awesome at the wedding!" Nora cheered.

"Ah, yeah, that was fun." Sun laughed. "I should be angry at the whole 'drugging my drink without permission' thing, but if Sage was the one doing it I really must have needed it. Guy's normally straight-laced."

"Are you okay?" Pyrrha asked. "Any side-effects?"

"Apart from shirtless, shiny dancing?" Nora added.

"Just the worst hangover of my life." Sun replied. "So enough dancing around it, what's on your minds?"

Pyrrha froze up, allowing Nora to take the lead. "Can we borrow your baby maker?" Nora asked. Sun choked heavily on his drink, and it was all he could do to spit it back into the cup rather than all over the table. Pyrrha hid her face in both her hands as Nora stifled a giggle.

"Hold up, hold up." Sun coughed. "What?!

"I want a baby, but we don't have the right equipment." Nora explained.

"What Nora is so eloquently trying to ask is...we would like to have a child...naturally." Pyrrha explained.

"By naturally you mean..." Sun started.

"Booping!" Nora exclaimed.

"Yes...that..." Pyrrha sighed.

"I...well...I...are you okay with this?" Sun stammered.

"There is no one else we could trust with this." Pyrrha declared.

"But are you okay with this?" Sun insisted.
"I won't lie, I'm not entirely comfortable with this specific situation." Pyrrha admitted. "It's new, it's different, it's...a lot to take in." She grasped Nora's hand. "But for Nora...I want her to have this Sun. But that's up to you."

Sun took a deep breath and reclined in his chair, looking a bit lost. "This is really happening?" He asked. "This is what you want?"

"Yep." Nora confirmed. "Unless science has gone too far and Pyrrha can grow a weiner, you're the only guy I would ask."

"I...don't think I'm ready to be a father Nora." Sun sighed.

"That's okay." Nora shrugged. "I'm not asking you to be a father. I just need a little help becoming a mother. What comes after is up to you and Pyrrha."

"Uh...can I think about it?" Sun asked.

"Of course!" Nora exclaimed. "I know to you two it's complicated and scary and all that. I understand, and I'll wait for you, both of you, until you're okay with this."

"Nora..." Pyrrha started.

"Pyrrha, it's okay to not be okay with this." Nora cut her off. "It's okay for you to say no. It's okay for both of you to say no. I can't have everything I want. I'm okay going to a sperm bank...eventually. It's just that I want everything to be normal, natural, loving. If I can help it, I want my kid to know who their daddy is, even if they aren't really their daddy so much as their uncle or weirdo friend who jumps around buildings for fun."

"I know Nora." Pyrrha sighed. "I just want you to be as happy as possible."

"And I love you for that, but you don't have to force yourself into something you're not really ready for just for my sake." Nora said. "We're all gonna' take our time, think about everything, maybe buy some books, watch some movies, ya' know, family stuff, see how things feel. And at any point, someone can say yes or no, and we're all gonna' accept that, even if it's a little painful, okay? I love you, both of you, and I want to do this, but only if you both can feel 100% the same about it, okay?"

"Okay." Sun nodded.

"Yes." Pyrrha said.

"Goody!" Nora cheered. "Now where's lunch? I want to try one of those slices too!"

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Sun got home with one hell of a weight on his mind. There was no simple way to think about the situation. There were so many questions, personal, emotional, even legal. He needed advice so he called Sage. "Hello Sun." Sage answered.

"Yo Sage." Sun said.

"Hmm?" Sage asked.

"Need your advice on a doozy." Sun replied.

"Shoot." Sage said.
"Nora wants my baby." Sun explained. "I don't know what to do."

"Jerk off, then make a decision." Sage advised.

"Fuck, why didn't I think of that?" Sun laughed.

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The next day Winter and Yang got back from Mistral, and Pyrrha arranged to meet with them the day after that. She wanted to speak with Winter about Nora's plans, and knew Nora would probably want to talk to Yang about it. They met up at Solstice Modeling HQ where Yang was posing for some shots promoting a video game. The office was equipped with a few basic sets and a green-screen, but most of the shoots were on-location. When Pyrrha and Nora arrived Yang was in front of the green-screen, posing in a black and tan ensemble with thigh-highs, a skirt and a jacket, all of it hugging her curves in a way that left little to the imagination. Pyrrha headed for Winter's office while Nora peeled off toward the shoot in progress.

"Hey Nora." Yang said when she spotted the new arrival. She held her pose for another shot.

"Ooh, who's this?" Nora asked, approaching the girl behind the camera. She was dressed simply in a red and white sweatshirt and black capri pants. A black beanie covered her pink hair and partially obscured her face.


Nora stopped short of May and looked her up and down. "She's a cutie." Nora said.

May blushed and pulled her beanie down to cover more of her face. "Alright Nora, she's still a little bashful." Yang said. She looped her arm around Nora and guided her towards the break room. "I'm sure we'll beat that out of her soon enough but take it easy on her for now."

"Yang, that outfit looks so cool." Nora observed. "Totally impractical, but really cool."

"My range of motion isn't great, but damn I look good." Yang laughed. She leaned against the break room counter while Nora took a seat at the table. "So what brings you in today? You and Pyrrha aren't scheduled."

"Pyrrha needed to talk to Winter about...something...and I wanted to talk to you." Nora answered.

"Oh?" Yang raised an eyebrow. "What's up?"

"I decided I want to have a kid." Nora replied.

"Well, either Pyrrha secretly has a cock, or there's more to it." Yang joked.

"Yeah, I want it all to be natural, so I asked Sun to be the father." Nora explained. "He hasn't decided yet, and Pyrrha hasn't exactly agreed to it either, but I'm hoping. If not I guess I could just go to a sperm bank or something."

"You want Sun to knock you up?" Yang asked. Nora nodded. "I can see why Pyrrha would be hesitant, but I'm a little surprised he didn't agree on the spot."

"Yeah, me too." Nora sighed. "He's my best friend, and there's no one else I'd trust with this. It's just...he didn't seem too enthusiastic about it."
"I wouldn't worry about it too much." Yang shrugged. "Sun's like me with a dick. The difference is he doesn't have parenting experience. Except for the Neptune thing, he's been pretty carefree until now. So he's probably just a little scared. I think once he's gotten used to the idea of fathering a kid he'll bend over backwards for both of you."

"If things go to plan I'll be the one bending over backwards..." Nora giggled.


"You're...my big sis." Nora said meekly. Yang stared at Nora for a moment before grinning and tearing up herself. "I didn't wanna'...I don't wanna' try to replace..."

"Silly, you could never replace Ruby." Yang said. They hugged again, tighter this time, while sniffling.

"Does this mean we can get matching tattoos?" Nora asked.

"Hah, we should all do that." Yang laughed. "We should probably ask Blake first though. She has enough trouble covering up the ones I already have."

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There was a knock at the office door. "Come in." Winter said. She glanced up from her paperwork as the door opened. "Hey Pyrrha." She finished what she was working on and set it aside. "What did you want to talk about?"

"Nora." Pyrrha replied. "She wants to have a kid, carry and all that. We haven't worked out all the details yet, but she wants Sun to be the father."

"You're okay with that?" Winter asked.

"I'm okay with her having a kid." Pyrrha replied. "The whole Sun thing...I'm not sure yet. I just want to make sure everything will be taken care of, whatever circumstances we face."

"Parenting leave is part of everyone's contracts." Winter reminded her. "So is child care and insurance."

"I know, but there's a little more to it." Pyrrha explained. "This is Nora we're talking about. She's...unpredictable...as it. With the hormones and everything associated with pregnancy, who knows what she'll get up to."

"True, but I wouldn't be too worried." Winter said. "She's still Nora. She won't do anything...too destructive."

"She's a wrecking ball." Pyrrha groaned. "And she'll be an even bigger one."

"Maybe she'll spend less time buzzing around the shoots." Winter shrugged.
"You know she'll want to do a pregnancy shoot." Pyrrha warned.

"I've already planned for it." Winter declared.

"Of course you have." Pyrrha sighed.

"It was only a matter of time before someone got pregnant." Winter explained. "A few of the companies we work with make maternity gear."

"As long as you don't mind having a hormonal Nora running around." Pyrrha said.

"I think we already do." Winter laughed. She suddenly turned serious. "I can tell there's more on your mind."

"Yeah...there is." Pyrrha sighed. "I want to...I want to make sure her future is secure. I know she's got money, I'm not worried about that, but..."

"But?" Winter pressed.

"If anything happens to me, I want to make sure Nora's taken care of." Pyrrha said. "I know you're all good friends, and you'll support her no matter what, but if the worst ever comes to pass, I don't want her to have to raise the child alone."

"I assure you, no matter what happens, I'll see to it that everything is taken care of." Winter promised. "We're not just friends here, we're family, and I truly mean that. Whether the problem is big or small, I'll be here to help, and I'm sure the others will be too."

"Well that...that's a weight off my mind." Pyrrha breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm glad you're so...understanding."

"I still scare you, don't I?" Winter accused.

"Honestly, yes." Pyrrha admitted. "I know you're super-nice, but you have that steely businesswoman vibe about you. I can't help but be intimidated."

"Would it help if I let my hair down and took my top off?" Winter smirked.

Pyrrha rolled her eyes. "What has Yang done to you?"

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"Heh, Sunsemination." Nora laughed.

"Oh God yes!" Yang cheered. "How about Sunpregnation?"

"Oh it's perfect!" Nora exclaimed. "You're the best."

"Hey you two." Pyrrha said as she entered the room. "How's it going?"

"Great!" Nora cheered. "We came up with some sweet names for the situation." Pyrrha raised an eyebrow. "How does Sunpregnation sound?"

"Yang, you're a terrible influence." Pyrrha groaned. She tried to look serious but soon burst into a fit of laughter. "That's hilarious!"

"Does that mean you're okay with it?" Nora asked. "The plan, not the name."
"I...I…" Pyrrha stammered. "I still need some time, okay?"

"No problem." Nora said, her smile never dipping. "Hey, can we stick around to watch the rest of Yang's shoot?"

"Sure." Pyrrha agreed. "But you have to promise not to hit on May."

"I won't lie to you." Nora said. She and Pyrrha just stared at one another.

Pyrrha sighed. "Fine."
Pyrrha realized how little she really knew about Sun. Sure, they had spent plenty of time together, but mostly in the context of him hanging out with Nora. When Pyrrha mentioned it to Nora, she suggested they spend a day together. Taking Nora out of the equation would let Pyrrha get to know Sun. Pyrrha called up Sun and they agreed to meet up on Saturday. Sun taught an adult beginner parkour class on Saturday mornings, but he invited Pyrrha to attend for free. It took some convincing, from Sun and Nora, but Pyrrha agreed to give it a shot.

Pyrrha showed up dressed for a workout, wearing shorts, a tank top, and a sports bra to hold everything in place. She had been unsure of how she was supposed to dress, but was relieved for find the rest of the class similarly attired. It all started off with a safety briefing. Sun explained the best way to fall, the dos and don'ts of the obstacles set up in the gym, and what to do in various situations. Judging by the bored looks on most of the students' faces, most had heard it all before. Pyrrha was surprised and impressed by how seriously Sun took safety.

Once the safety talk was over, Sun led the group through some stretching, then it was on to the obstacles. First off were balance tests, the students running across narrow bars and cables. Pyrrha had no problems. After that were some basic jumps across various gaps. There were plenty of pads and soft floor mats to catch the students in the case of a miss, but again Pyrrha had no trouble. Going in she had not been afraid of getting hurt so much as embarrassing herself. Even though it was her first class, she seemed lightyears ahead of many of the others, and those anxieties melted away.

Pyrrha ran into her first trouble when the climbing started. Her upper body strength was a bit lacking, hardly a surprise given her usual focus on aerobics. Many of the students struggled to run up a curved wall that was about four meters tall, most failing to get their hands to the top. Pyrrha had no difficulty running up and reaching the top, but she did struggle a bit to pull herself up. Using her legs to push off the wall helped but it was still a battle. The next obstacle was no easier. It consisted of two parallel walls, just far enough apart that it was not possible to brace between them, about three meters high. The idea was to jump off one and grab the top of the other, then climb to the platform at the top.

A collective gasp rose from the crowd. Sun raced to Pyrrha's side and slid onto his knees next to her. "Damn Pyrrha, are you alright?" He asked.

"My boob hurts." Pyrrha groaned.

"Your...well, that sounds like concussion talk." Sun sighed. "I'll call…"

"No, sorry, I'm fine." Pyrrha gasped, struggling to catch her breath. "Just got the wind knocked out of me."
"And your…" Sun started.

"Good thing I have some padding." Pyrrha forced a laugh.

"Alright, do you want some ice or something?" Sun asked. "Want to sit out…"

"Oh no, I'm not sitting out." Pyrrha declared. "I'm having the time of my life!"

"That's not what I'd expect from someone who just ate shit like that." Sun laughed. "Are you sure you didn't hit your head?"

"I'm fine." Pyrrha assured him.

"If you say so." Sun shrugged. He stood and turned to the class. "Alright everybody, get back in there."

--

The class went on without incident. Pyrrha still struggled with her upper body strength but now knew better than to try to catch a slip. Falling to the padding below was much better than swinging wildly onto concrete. At the end of class Sun doled out praise, critique and advice. After talking to a few of the participants Sun rejoined Pyrrha who had changed into her street clothes. He proposed they head to the local Simple Wok to get lunch and Pyrrha agreed. Once there Sun ordered some spicy noodle soup and Pyrrha chose pork dumplings.

"If you feel sick, make sure you tell me, alright?" Sun said.

"Sun, I'll be fine." Pyrrha assured him. "I've dealt with worse in the past."

"Really?" Sun asked skeptically.

"I...didn't have the best of upbringings." Pyrrha said, forcing a smile.

"Fair enough." Sun said. "I won't pry."

"Thank you." Pyrrha said.

"So what's Nora up to?" Sun asked.

"Spending the day with Yang, probably annoying Winter." Pyrrha laughed.

"I think she's warmed up to her by now." Sun suggested.

"She's certainly tolerant." Pyrrha agreed. "I don't know if warmed is the right term for it though. Winter understands Nora's personality, and has adjusted her expectations accordingly."

"I think I saw her crack a smirk once." Sun said. "Even if she pretends she doesn't like it, I think she's grown on the Ice Queen."

"I hope so." Pyrrha said. "She did have a plan for if Nora, well, anyone really, got pregnant."

"Seriously?" Sun asked.

"Yeah, there's a huge market for glamor pictures of pregnancy." Pyrrha explained. "It's a beautiful thing really...have you been thinking about it?"
"Yeah, it's a big thing, huge thing." Sun replied. "It's gonna' take a bit to digest, and I'm honestly surprised Nora's the one going for it out of everyone."

"Who did you think was more likely?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yang, definitely Yang." Sun answered. "She's got a real hip mom vibe about her."

"I agree, Yang would make a great mother." Pyrrha smiled. "She already dotes on Nora when they're together."

"They're great together." Sun said. "To be honest, I half expected them to end up together."

"They do fit, but I think Yang sees Nora as a sister more than anything." Pyrrha said. "I know that's how Nora sees Yang."

"I feel like having those two in the same family would cause a lot of collateral damage." Sun laughed.

"Like the movie?" Pyrrha asked.

"No, that was Collateral Carnage." Sun corrected. "One of Nora's favorites."

"I thought her favorite was Auric Fist." Pyrrha said.

"That's her second favorite." Sun said.

"Damnit, I thought I knew these things." Pyrrha sighed.

"She changes her mind a bunch, so maybe we're both wrong." Sun shrugged. "Spruce Lee has a lot of great hits."

"A fair point." Pyrrha agreed. "Though that reminds me, I need to pick up the new special edition Nora has been asking for."

"The one with the translated commentary?" Sun asked. "I've been thinking of getting that too. I'll come with, if you want."

"I would appreciate the company." Pyrrha said. "Do you need any groceries? I might do a shopping run as well."

"I am running low on bread." Sun replied. "I was hanging out with Sage, Scarlet came over, and we had some fun fucking with him."

"Do I want to know?" Pyrrha groaned.


--

After lunch the first stop was the local electronics store. Sun headed for the action movie section, knowing exactly where he might find the special edition of Auric Fist, if it was in stock. Pyrrha took a different approach, finding a salesperson to ask. Just as the salesperson was tapping away at her computer to look it up, Sun came rushing over. "Pyrrha, you have to come see this." He said with barely contained glee.

"But she's just looking…” Pyrrha protested.
"Now!" Sun exclaimed. He grabbed Pyrrha by the arm and dragged her away.

"Sorry...uh...thank you!" Pyrrha shouted back to the very confused salesperson.

"Behold." Sun said while making a sweeping gesture with his hand in the general direction of a large box.


"It gets better." Sun declared. "Look at the special features."

"Translated commentary tracks, behind the scenes videos..." Pyrrha gasped. "Never before seen training videos! A two hour Spruce Lee biography! This is incredible!"

"Right?" Sun said. "If only it wasn't so expensive."

Pyrrha glanced at the price tag. 400 lien. Steep. It only took her a moment to make her decision. "I make doctor money and Nora's a millionaire." She said. "I'm getting it."

"We're going to marathon this, right?" Sun suggested.

"Definitely." Pyrrha agreed. "Let's get home and get this started."

"How is coming up with baby names so hard?" Nora complained. She sat on the couch beside Yang, the pair both ignoring the TV show playing in front of them.

"Yeah, no wonder I ended up with the female version of my father's name." Yang laughed. "If you have a girl you could name her Nora Jr. If it's a boy you could go with Norman."

"Nah, that's kind of lame." Yang warned.

"Yeah, it would be a little weird to name my kid after my dead husband." Nora shrugged.

"Wow." Yang gasped.

"And if it was a girl it wouldn't fit at all." Nora added.

"Maybe something with Sun since he's the father?" Yang suggested.

"Hmm...maybe." Nora shrugged. "It'll probably end up depending on what they look like, you know, hair, eye and skin color. Color is beautiful, and I want my kid to be as beautiful as can be."

"Doesn't Pyrrha's name mean red?" Nora asked. "Pyrrhus is the male version right?"

"Somehow I don't think Sun and I would make a baby with red hair." Nora laughed. "Maybe pink or orange."

"Pinky doesn't exactly have the best ring to it." Yang laughed. "And orange...it doesn't even rhyme with anything. Hmm...flowers...or seasons?" Yang shrugged.

"Ren did love his garden...I love his garden." Nora said. "It's full of...lilies."
"Lilly isn't a terrible name." Yang said. "It's actually kind of cute. If you have a boy you'll be out of luck…"

"Just don't name them after birds." Raven suggested, walking over and plopping down on the couch between them. "Birds tend to fly away."

"Subtle." Yang said. "When did you get here?"

"Pinky is terrible." Raven laughed. "Having the TV blaring made it a little hard to hear you two, but it made sneaking up pretty easy."

"Planning to scare us?" Yang asked.

"Yeah, but I just didn't have the heart." Raven admitted. "Coming up with a name for your child is a serious thing. You don't want to stick them with something that'll ruin their life. Pinky for instance."

"We get it, no on Pinky." Yang rolled her eyes.

"I wanted to name you Ember." Raven said.

"That's a pretty name." Nora said. "Hmm…"

"I'm pretty happy with Yang." Yang said. "It's easy to rhyme."

"Exactly why I didn't want to name you that." Raven laughed. "I figured it would make you easier to pick on."

"A few strategic face-punches took care of that." Yang smirked.

"I guess you do take after me a little." Raven said.

"So Rave, what brings you here?" Nora asked.

"I just thought I'd stop by to spend some quality time with my daughter." Raven replied. Yang and Nora looked at her skeptically. "And we're running low on scotch. I was hoping to borrow a bottle. Glynda won't buy me booze anymore."

"Probably because you have a drinking problem." Yang joked.

"It runs in the family." Raven shrugged.

"Don't you have a job?" Nora asked. "You can buy it yourself."

"Yeah, but the good stuff is expensive." Raven complained. "It's much cheaper to have Winter pay for it."

"Speaking of you and Winter…" Yang started.

"I know, I'm sorry." Raven quickly cut in. "I was really drunk and...and...well you made out with Glynda too!"

"Glynda made out with me." Yang countered. "And it only lasted like five seconds. You were making out with my girlfriend for a good ten minutes before we pried you apart."

"She seemed pretty into it." Raven joked.
"She thought you were me!" Yang shouted.

"I'm flattered." Raven smirked.

"She has thick beer goggles." Yang grumbled.

"Ouch." Raven said. "Anyway, it's good that you're here too Nora. I've been meaning to talk to you."

"Really?" Nora asked. "What about?"

"About what you're planning to do with Sun." Raven replied. "Have you thought this through? Polyamory...it's like playing with fire. You can do some really awesome stuff...but you might just get burned."

"I have thought it through." Nora declared. "I've thought about it a lot. We're not rushing into this, and I'm not going to pressure Sun or Pyrrha. And even if we go through with this, I'm not sure things will end up that way."

"I just...I don't want you to repeat my mistakes." Raven sighed. "Even without the polyamory aspect...having a kid...it's a big deal. It can be...terrifying, and painful. You might end up having a tougher time connecting with your child than you expect, and then...you might end up hating yourself like I did."

"Rave..." Nora sighed, laying a hand on Raven's shoulder.

"Just...whatever happens...don't run away." Raven insisted with tears in her eyes. "It's the worst thing you can do. If you have a problem, talk about it, don't hide it like I did. Otherwise you'll just end up making things worse." She turned to Yang. "I'm so sorry for what I did..."

"I know mom." Yang said. She leaned over and hugged Raven. Yang rarely called her mom. They had grown closer, but more like sisters than mother and daughter. "I've forgiven you."

"I just...Nora, promise me you won't run away." Raven implored.

"I promise." Nora declared. She leaned in and hugged Raven as well.

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Sun and Pyrrha sat on the couch, Pyrrha holding the box set on her lap to open it up. She slid her nail across the plastic to break the seal, then lifted the lid. "What's this?" She asked, pulling a large sheet of paper from inside. She unfolded it to reveal a large poster of a shirtless Spruce Lee.

"Oh sweet!" Sun cheered. "You know, I had a poster sort of like that when I was a kid. It was him in basically the same pose, shiny with sweat, like he just got done fighting. It was older looking and had that weird image quality you saw back then where he looked kinda' plastic, and it was from a magazine, so it wasn't that big, but damn I loved it."

"You with a poster of a sweaty dude on your wall?" Pyrrha laughed. "Bet that made your parents nervous."

"They wouldn't have cared if I was gay." Sun shrugged. "They were really laid back about that sort of thing...well...about everything really. I didn't care anyway. Spruce Lee was my hero. I mean, have you seen the abs on that guy?"
"Yes...yes I have..." Pyrrha said, licking her lips.

"I wanted to be just like him." Sun continued. "I tried taking kung fu classes but I kept cracking wise...you know, like he does in some of his movies...and they kicked me out. Then I just started working out. I figured I could at least look like him, even if I couldn't fight like him. I had the poster on my wall, and I told myself one day, one day I'd look like that and take a picture recreating it."

"Have you?" Pyrrha asked.

Sun thought for a moment. "Fuck!" He shouted. "Well, we've got phones. How about we do it now?"

"Are you kidding?" Pyrrha laughed. "We work for a modeling company. We're getting this professionally done."

"Oh, this is gonna' be awesome!" Sun cheered.

"But until then, how about we watch some movies?" Pyrrha suggested.

"Hell yeah." Sun agreed.

Pyrrha made some popcorn and grabbed a pair of beverages, and the movie marathon began. First up was the Auric Trilogy, Spruce Lee's most famous works. The set came with a choice of audio track, subbed or dubbed, but they watched them dubbed because that was the classic experience for them. "I never really liked Auric Vengeance." Pyrrha complained after the trilogy was done. "It just seems kind of pointless, like a repeat of the first two."

"Yeah, but it's got some sweet stunts though." Sun said. "Nothing like Auric Fury but that had the biggest budget."

"Auric Fist is still the best by far." Pyrrha said. "They never really captured the magic of the first one."

"Yeah, but they're all great." Sun argued. "Fury and Vengeance are only lame when you compare them to Fist. As standalone films they're awesome."

"I suppose you're right." Pyrrha shrugged. "So, what should we watch next?"

"How about Gauntlet of the Huntress?" Sun asked.

"Ooh, I love that one." Pyrrha said. "Some people say Spruce didn't have a big enough part, and that they were ramming Ember Celica down everyone's throats to attract female viewers, but I still think it's one of his best."

"Plus Ember's hot." Sun added. "I actually got to meet her once."

"Really?" Pyrrha gasped. "Is she as cool in real life as she is in the movie?"

"Yeah, kind of." Sun shrugged. "It was at this convention a few years ago. Most people there had no idea who she was but she got really excited when she realized how big a fan I was. We started quoting the movie, entire scenes even, and she was really into it. It's a shame her career kind of just died out...and that she's not 20 years younger...and that she's married."

"She was one of my heroes when I was a kid." Pyrrha sighed. "I always wished I could be that cool..."
The front door swung open and Nora stepped in. "Hey Pyrrha, I'm home!" She cheered. "Maybe we could take a shower...oh, Sun, you're here."

"Hey Nora." Sun said.

"Hello." Pyrrha said. "We were just watching some movies together."

"Yeah, we picked up this awesome Spruce Lee box set!" Sun exclaimed, pointing to the box. "We just finished the Auric Trilogy and we were about to watch Gauntlet of the Huntress."

"You...you watched Auric Fist without me?" Nora asked as her lip quivered and tears welled in her eyes.

"Sorry, we were just so excited." Pyrrha apologized. "We can watch it again if you want."

"Oh...well...it just wouldn't be the same..." Nora sighed.

"It's got deleted scenes..." Sun said.

"Really?!" Nora gasped. "Awesome! Let's watch!" She raced over to the couch, sitting between Sun and Pyrrha. The trio watched the Auric Trilogy again, then Collateral Carnage and Gauntlet of the Huntress. Nora fell asleep shortly after the start of the final film. One second she was cheering, miming the moves, the next she was snoring, lying with her head on Pyrrha's lap and her feet on Sun's legs. When the movie was over Pyrrha turned the TV off with the remote. "I should probably take her to bed." Pyrrha whispered.

"Hey, uh...do you mind if I spend the night?" Sun asked. "It's pretty late already. I can just crash on the couch."

"Sure, and you can have the guest room if you want." Pyrrha offered. "By the way, are you doing anything tomorrow?"

"No, nothing planned at least." Sun replied.

"Why not spend the day with us?" Pyrrha suggested. "We've got a lot of movies to go."

"That sounds awesome." Sun agreed. "I'm down."

"Great," Pyrrha said. She slipped herself out from under Nora, then stood and grabbed her under the arms. "Up we go." She lifted Nora over her shoulder and carried her toward the bedroom.

"I will have my vengeance!" Nora mumbled, no doubt in the midst of kung fu dreams.
Sun was rudely awoken from pleasant dreams of burgers, beer and bitches by what felt like a rather large cannonball lodging itself in his crotch. "Wakey wakey banana shakey!" Nora cheered.

"Agh...Nora..." Sun groaned. "Isn't it 'eggs and bakey'?

"No, it's an actual banana shakey." Nora replied. She jiggled the cup in her hand for emphasis before taking a slurp and giggling. "I think I'm sitting on your phone."

"No Nora, that's just my penis." Sun corrected.

"Ah, I thought it felt a little small." Nora joked. She shifted herself so she was straddling his legs rather than sitting on his pelvis. Sun winced and reached below the covers to adjust himself. Nora beat him to it, tapping his bulge with her forefinger. "Boop."

"Hey!" Sun admonished.

"When you're done playing with mini-me, Pyrrha's cooking breakfast." Nora laughed. She held out the shake. "Here."

Sun grabbed the half-empty shake and Nora hopped off, racing back to the kitchen. "Her ass feels bigger than it looks." Sun grumbled. He sat up on the couch, finished off the shake, and got up to head for the kitchen. Still groggy, he lumbered in, meeting a sight that made him freeze. Pyrrha stood in front of the stove, tending to a pancake while wearing nothing but a loose singlet, panties and an apron. Nora grinned at him from the nearby kitchen table. "Good morning sunshine!" she chirped.

"Oh, good morning Sun." Pyrrha said without looking away from her work. "Breakfast is just about ready. Do you like anything specific on your pancakes?"

"Uh...butter." Sun answered.

"Butter, you hardly knew 'er." Nora giggled. Pyrrha turned around to smirk at Nora, stifling a giggle of her own. Nora turned to Sun and gestured for him to take a seat beside her. As he did so she leaned in to whisper to him. "She does this every morning. Really wakes you up, doesn't it?" Sun huffed and shook his head in exasperation. He tried, and failed, to avert his gaze from the lovely chef.

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After breakfast Pyrrha and Nora suggested Sun shower. They insisted that as their guest he had the first go. Pyrrha did check the bathroom first to make sure everything was clean and nothing...embarrassing...was out in the open. When Sun emerged after his shower, Nora dragged a very red Pyrrha in. While they were occupied, Sun busied himself tidying up. He folded up the blanket he had used, cleaned up the mess left over from movie night, then set about doing the dishes. Just as he was finishing up Nora and Pyrrha entered the kitchen.

"Hey, I cleaned up a little." Sun said.

"Oh, thank you." Pyrrha said. "You didn't have to."
"It's only fair." Sun shrugged. "Breakfast was awesome."

"Aw, look at him." Nora squealed. "He's being all domestic." She ruffled Sun's hair and hugged him. "What's for dinner hubby?"

"Order in pizza?" Sun said, more a question than a statement.

"You really know how to treat a gal." Pyrrha laughed.

"I do my best!" Sun declared.

"Which is why you can never hold down a girl." Nora teased.

"Oh, I can hold them down." Sun smirked. "Course they tend to leave after, but that's cool. I'm not gonna' bitch. A fun time's a fun time."

"You ever wanted more?" Pyrrha asked.

"Of course I've wanted more." Sun confirmed. "But you know, my lifestyle isn't for everyone, and if they're not interested in living it I'm not gonna' drop everything for them."

"No one wanted life with a parkour instructor who is also a male model with chiseled abs?" Nora asked.

"Who sucks at cooking, doesn't like to travel, and gives most of his money to charity." Sun added.

"You do?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, a bunch of the kids we teach come from foster homes, orphanages, or just really poor families." Sun explained. "It doesn't feel right you know, seeing that and not doing anything about it. I grew up pretty poor, and in kind of a shitty neighborhood, so I know what it's like."

"What was your childhood like?" Nora asked.

"I mean, it wasn't too bad." Sun shrugged. "My mother never had a job, and my dad was in and out of a job. Even when he had one it didn't pay much so money was always tight. Sometimes it wasn't even enough to put food on the table, but we made due. My parents were really cool, always supportive and all that, so I guess I don't have much to complain about. We lived in a rough neighborhood with a lot of crime and gangs and shit, but I stayed away from that. Then, just before I started high school, my dad got a good job. We had to move to Vale, and we still didn't have much, but money wasn't super-tight anymore. I didn't have to worry about if I would get to eat or not, and I actually got to wear new clothes instead of donated stuff."

"How'd you end up with the business and house?" Pyrrha asked.

"Well, I met Neptune in high school." Sun replied. "He was rich as shit. Never really cared about money though. After we graduated we moved into the house...his money...and lived the bachelor life. One day I told him about the parkour gym idea. He wasn't athletic, kind of a nerd really, but he knew a good idea when he heard one. With his cash...again...we set up the place. He worked the business side while I ran the classes. The thing took off, we hired our friends to help, it was great. Then when he died...he left everything to me. I gave a lot away to charity, friends, family, just kept what I would need. I like to think he'd be proud, but when I gave all that away...his ghost was probably shitting itself. 'There goes Sun with his not understanding money again.' Ah well, it all worked out I guess."
"That's a really inspiring story." Nora said. "Why didn't you ever tell us?"

"I guess I never thought it was that interesting, didn't think you would either." Sun answered. "I was poor, now I'm not. The circumstances are different, but your story is pretty similar."

"I guess so." Nora shrugged. "I feel like mine's a lot more depressing."

"Probably." Sun laughed. "Still worked out for you."

"Hey Pyrrha...you never told us what it was like for you growing up." Nora observed. "You're such an angel, I bet it was like a fairytale."

"Nora, maybe we shouldn't..." Sun started.

"No, it's alright." Pyrrha cut in. "I suppose it's only fair for me to tell you what my childhood was like."

"If it's too painful..." Sun said.

"Painful?" Nora gasped.

"My upbringing was...painful." Pyrrha sighed. "My parents never wanted a girl. They treated me poorly. My mother never had a nice thing to say and my father was...far less pleasant." She cringed at the memory. "Then my brother Alexander was born. They loved him. It was good for a while, they were too busy with him to pay any attention to me, but they never forgot to remind me I was unwanted. Then my brother started to treat me like they did. I don't really blame him, it's what he was taught. I played a lot of sports in high school, mostly to get away from home, and it turned out I was pretty good. I got a full scholarship for college, and left my family forever. I met Glynda at university, and the rest is history."

"Wow...that's...awful." Nora said with tears in her eyes. "You're such a nice person. It's not fair."

"I'm over it." Pyrrha shrugged. The tone of her voice and look in her eyes made that statement seem of questionable truthfulness. "Besides, it worked out fine. I met you guys, all our friends. Now life is really great."

"If you ever want to talk about it..." Sun offered.

"I've talked about it plenty with Glynda." Pyrrha said. "There's no sense in me bringing you guys down over it."

"Well, this turned really depressing." Sun sighed.

"I'm sorry." Pyrrha sighed.

"Hey, how about we do some gardening?" Nora suggested. "That always makes me happy?"

"That sounds like a wonderful idea." Pyrrha said, seemingly shifting out of her melancholy. "You're welcome to join us Sun."

"I'd love to." Sun agreed. "Always wanted a garden like Nora's."

Sun had little faith in his own gardening skills, and Nora clearly shared his doubts. While Nora watered the flowers and Pyrrha weeded, Sun was tasked with clearing up fallen leaves and petals. Once that was done he would mow the grass.
"Hey Pyrrha." Nora called.

"Hmm?" Pyrrha asked, turning to face her. She was met with a sudden blast from Nora's hose. She gasped, shaking the water from her face and hair. "Nora…” Nora blasted her again. Pyrrha spluttered while trying to respond, receiving a third blast before she could recover. "That's it!" Pyrrha charged at Nora who sprayed her during the approach. The pair grappled for the hose, nozzle wide open spraying them both as they struggled. Nora squealed and giggled while Pyrrha grunted with effort, unable to overcome Nora's brute strength. Finally Pyrrha hooked a leg behind Nora's and tripped her. Nora released the hose as she fell onto her back, allowing Pyrrha to take control. She mercilessly blasted Nora in the face as Nora cackled and spluttered, slapping weakly at the stream of water before giving in and covering her face. "Now who's on top?"

"You are, you are!" Nora yelled.

Pyrrha ceased the drenching, holding the hose like a freshly fired gun, dripping water instead of smoking. "And don't you forget it." Pyrrha smirked. "Ugh...now I'm all wet."

"One of my favorite phrases!" Nora cheered.

Pyrrha chuckled before looking at Nora who lie on the ground breathless and grinning before her, Nora's white shirt rendered sheer by the water. "Nora, you're not wearing a bra." Pyrrha sighed.

"Well duh, I'm at home." Nora shrugged as she got to her feet and brushed herself off.

"You're wearing a white shirt." Pyrrha added.

"It's hot outside." Nora explained.

"Nora, I can see your breasts." Pyrrha finally said.

"Hmm…” Nora looked down. "Oh, awesome! Hey Sun, enjoying the show?"

"Just pretend I'm not here." Sun said, trying his best to ignore her.

"Come on Pyrrha, let's give him an encore." Nora suggested. She pushed herself up on her toes to kiss Pyrrha. Pyrrha briefly reciprocated before remembering herself and pulling away.

"Come on, let's get changed." Pyrrha said.

"Naw, spoilsport." Nora grumbled.

"Bedroom, now." Pyrrha commanded.

"Yes ma'am!" Nora exclaimed as she snapped to attention. She sprinted into the house.

Pyrrha shook her head in exasperation and looked to Sun. He had a stupefied expression on his face. They shared a chuckle before Pyrrha headed inside after Nora. "I need to come by more often." Sun laughed once he was alone. He went back to tending the lawn, finishing his work before Nora and Pyrrha returned. Sun decided to explore, walking around the carefully tended garden. It had always been one of his favorite places in Vale. He would probably never make it to Mistral, so this was as close as he would get to visiting one of the locations of Auric Fist. The beautiful garden was more than enough to satisfy such desires.

"Lunch is almost ready!" Nora called from the door.
"That's why you were taking so long." Sun said. "I thought you were banging."

"Who says we weren't?" Nora giggled.

Sun headed in, washed up, and sat down just in time for Pyrrha to slide a plate in front of him. It held a burrito and some rice. Having worked up a serious appetite from working, he quickly began devouring the meal. "So, you like the garden?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, it's really beautiful, like something out of a Spruce Lee movie." Sun replied. "I appreciate it even more now, knowing how much work it is to maintain it."

"It's not easy, but it's totally worth it." Nora declared.

"It's really peaceful too." Sun added.

"Would you like to meditate with us after lunch?" Pyrrha offered.

"Meditate?" Sun asked.

"We go out in the gazebo and meditate a lot." Nora explained. "I did it all the time even before we started dating."

"You...meditate?" Sun gasped. "I didn't think you could sit still for five seconds."

"Normally she can't." Pyrrha admitted. "I was surprised at first, but out there in the garden Nora can be quite tranquil."

"I guess I could give it a shot." Sun shrugged. "Never really tried meditation before."

"Oh, it's super easy." Nora said. "You just empty your mind and sit there, thinking about everything and nothing."

"Sit there thinking about nothing?" Sun laughed. "I think I can handle that."

--

Sun and Pyrrha sat cross-legged beside each other in the gazebo, Nora in front of them grinning excitedly. "Okay Sunny Jim, ready to experience a higher state of consciousness?" Nora asked.

"I guess." Sun shrugged.

"That's the spirit!" Nora cheered. "Now, the most important thing to do is to drive out all distractions. We're cleaning our minds of unnecessary thoughts and attuning ourselves with the simplicity of nature. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, then let it out slowly. Let go of your conscious form, let your body relax. Focus on the sounds and sensations around you, the cooling wind rustling through the trees, the birds calling, the sound of your own breathing. Let all that ails you drift away, leaving your mind clean and pure."

With that Nora shut her eyes. Sun glanced at Pyrrha who shot him an amused grin before closing her own eyes. Nora's goofy smile faded into a placid grin, the excited tension in her shoulders gradually melted away, until the Nora sitting there scarcely resembled the hyperactive ball of energy Sun knew as his best friend. Sun had heard a lot about Ren over the years, but until now he had never been able to picture the calming, peaceful demeanor Nora had described him as having. It really made Sun think, how could he compare to the man that taught Nora to relax like this? Nora, the most excitable, free individual he knew, was now sitting completely still, barely a hair moving out of place.
Perhaps the whole not thinking idea was pretty good right now. Sun closed his eyes, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly as Nora had instructed. He focused on the world outside his vision, the gentle wind washed over him like a wave, he could almost feel the tree leaves fluttering in his stomach...his stomach? "Uh-oh." Sun groaned. He cursed the delicious lunch as his stomach bubbled and he felt a new pressure forming. Of all the times he needed to cut one, in the midst of a search for inner peace was among the worst of them. This was not a tiny little fluff that he could let seep out with the hope that the wind would carry it away. It was growing by the second, and he began to strain to hold it in. He did not know what god to pray to and there was no time to think it over.

BrrrrrrRRRRRRRT!

Sun wanted nothing more than to die right that moment, to not have to face the repercussions of what he had just done. A long and painful silence reigned before a snicker sounded from his side. Opening his eyes he saw Nora staring at him, red faced and wide-eyed. Looking to his right he saw Pyrrha fit to burst, hands covering her mouth as her whole body shook. "Uh...excuse me..." Sun sighed.

Pyrrha broke, laughing uncontrollably, followed shortly thereafter by Nora who began rolling around the floor of the gazebo, holding her stomach as she cackled. Pyrrha's laugh was so harsh it came out more as a long, drawn out wheeze, and she could barely suck in breath. Sun buried his face in his hands, feeling the heat of his growing blush. "I never thought to...bring a bugle to meditation!" Nora laughed.

Pyrrha almost recovered, only to lapse into another fit of painful laughter. "I...ow...I can't..." She said breathlessly through unstoppable laughs. "I can't...hng...Sun...damn you!" Pyrrha's laughs turned to sobs and Sun found himself praying to whatever deity would listen to just make it all end. His dream had become a nightmare. If he opened his eyes and found he was suddenly in his underwear he would not have been shocked. Horrified to be stuck in the cruel reality, he groaned loudly and fell onto his back, again hiding his face in his hands. He felt a hand slap weakly at his chest, and turned to a bleary-eyed and giddy Pyrrha grinning at him while chuckling. "Oh bless you Sun, you adorable goof."

I guess it's not so bad. He thought.

"Wait 'til Yang hears about this!" Nora giggled.

Sun sighed. "Damnit."

Further meditation was not going to happen. Pyrrha was stuck with giggle fits and Nora had lost all that tranquility Sun had so recently observed. For his part, Sun was far too embarrassed to find inner peace. So the group headed back inside for part two of their Spruce Lee movie marathon.


"Gah!" Pyrrha gasped. "Easy Nora!"

"At least you didn't land on my balls this time." Sun sighed.

"Come on guys." Nora said. She reached up, grabbing either of their faces and pushing them closer
together. "Relax, snuggle up."

"You okay with this?" Sun asked.

"Nora won't let us watch the movie until we do." Pyrrha shrugged.

Sun leaned toward Pyrrha and she toward him, resting their shoulders against one another's.
"Happy?" Sun asked.

"See, isn't that better?" Nora asked.

"It's alright." Sun shrugged.

"Good." Nora smiled. "Now let's watch!"
The movie marathon continued, shifting from Spruce Lee's better known films to the really obscure flicks. "You know, Spruce Lee had his own stunt team." Nora said.

"He did?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, he was a perfectionist." Sun confirmed.

"He'd do every scene over and over and over until it was just right." Nora explained.

"Sometimes a hundred takes or more." Sun added.

"That's impressive." Pyrrha said. "I've always felt his fight scenes were among the best. So few Valesian films are as satisfying."

"I saw a video that broke things down." Sun said. "He sells punches better by showing the impact twice, with a cut just after the first hit. It's so rapid that it looks like one hit, but it's so much better."

"Nerd!" Nora taunted.

"Says my best friend." Sun rolled his eyes.

Pyrrha poked Nora. "Nerd." Pyrrha laughed. Nora cackled as Pyrrha poked her repeatedly. Pyrrha looked to Sun, smirking, poking away as Nora poorly tried to protect herself. Sun clued in and started poking as well. Nora could not defend against the harmless onslaught as both Sun and Pyrrha mercilessly ravaged her with tickles, ignoring her screams and begging. Eventually they relented when Nora started to wheeze.

"Uncle, uncle!" Nora cried.

"Hmm...do you think she's suffered enough?" Pyrrha asked.

"Oh, I don't know." Sun smirked. "I still feel a little offended."

"I'm sowny." Nora pouted. "Want me to kissy better?" She held up her hands like paws, giving her patented puppy dog eyes.

"Damnit." Sun sighed, unable to resist.

"Bad Nora, bad!" Pyrrha jokingly admonished. "No manipulating!" Nora whined and buried her face in Pyrrha's stomach. "No hiding!" Nora saw her chance at revenge. She tugged up Pyrrha's shirt and blew a raspberry on her exposed belly. Pyrrha squealed and laughed, pushing Nora off the couch. Nora landed on the floor giggling.

"Never a dull moment here." Sun observed.

"No, there certainly isn't." Pyrrha laughed.

Nora climbed back onto their laps, this time placing her head on Sun. "Hello!" She cheered.

"Watch the movie...nerd." Sun teased. Nora poked out her tongue at Sun but obeyed. Sun shared a
smirk with Pyrrha, then they too went back to watching the movie.

--

Nora fell asleep, trapping Sun and Pyrrha in place. They continued watching movies until they too fell asleep, Sun leaning against the end of the couch with Pyrrha leaning against him. In the morning Pyrrha woke to Sun's snoring. She leaned away and looked at him. Waking up like that...it did not feel wrong. "Good morning!" Nora yelled.

Pyrrha jolted and turned, and Sun snapped awake. "Oh...morning." Sun groaned.

"Good...good morning." Pyrrha said.

"You two look so cute together." Nora cheered. She then bounced out of the room.

"You sleep alright?" Sun asked.

"Yeah, fine." Pyrrha replied. "You?"

"Like a rock." Sun answered.

"You make a pretty good pillow." Pyrrha laughed.

"So not repulsed by me, that's good." Sun joked.

"No, not at all." Pyrrha laughed. "I think I could get used to this."

"You sure?" Sun asked.

"Yeah." Pyrrha confirmed. "Don't tell Nora. She might get jealous."

"Speaking of Nora, she probably wants something to eat." Sun observed. He looked at the clock. "I have a while before I need to get to work. I could help make breakfast."

"I thought you don't cook?" Pyrrha said.

"I make a mean scrambled egg." Sun said with a wink.

"Sounds great." Pyrrha giggled. "I'll fry up some bacon."

--

After a rather lively breakfast Sun headed home. Pyrrha showered, dressed, and headed to work. As usual she made it to the office before Glynda, though her first appointment was not scheduled for another two hours. Glynda arrived soon after, her first appointment of the day just before Pyrrha's. Pyrrha did some paperwork at the desk in the waiting room while Glynda headed into the office proper. After a few minutes Pyrrha got up and knocked on Glynda's door.

"Come in." Glynda said. She too was in the midst of doing some paperwork. "What is it Pyrrha?"

"Do you have a few minutes to talk?" Pyrrha asked.

"For you, of course." Glynda replied. She got up and moved to the chair she used when seeing patients. "Take a seat." Pyrrha sat in the chair usually occupied by patients. "So what's on your mind?"
"I spent the weekend with Sun." Pyrrha said. "You know, to get to know him, to see how it felt. It was Nora's idea. We had a lot of fun. Last night we both fell asleep on the couch, and we woke up sort of snuggling."

"How did that feel?" Glynda asked.

"It felt okay." Pyrrha shrugged. "I didn't hate it. I...I'm just not entirely sure how I feel."

"About intimacy, or about him in general?" Glynda asked.

"I don't have a problem with Sun in general." Pyrrha explained. "He's a great guy. You know intimacy has always been a bit of a hang-up for me though."

"Why does it matter?" Glynda asked. "If you trust him, if you like him as a person, that's all that matters. Nora's the one who needs to be intimate with him for the whole thing to work."

"The thing is...I don't think I could handle the idea of him going into a room with Nora, knowing they're going to have sex." Pyrrha sighed. "It's stupid and irrational, but I'm jealous, possessive I guess. If they're going to do it, I want to be a part of it."

"So have a threesome." Glynda suggested.

"Never thought I would hear those words come out of your mouth." Pyrrha laughed. "Raven's a bad influence." Glynda smirked. "Nora brought up the idea too. I...I have given that some thought. It's probably the best solution, but there are problems there too."

"Is the idea of being intimate with Sun that much..." Glynda started.

"Not Sun." Pyrrha cut in. "Well, not just Sun. I've never...I've never...been with...a man before. If there's any man, it would be Sun, but..."

"But what?" Glynda pressed.

"I'm afraid." Pyrrha admitted.

"Afraid of what?" Glynda asked.

"The pain." Pyrrha replied. "I've never been...penetrated...before. I've always heard about how painful it is, and...I'm afraid."

"The level of pain actually varies widely from person to person." Glynda said.

"I know that...Nora said she didn't feel any pain, but I can't really go by her." Pyrrha said. "Her sense of pain is so warped it's meaningless. Yang said her first time was incredibly painful. Was...was yours?"

"It wasn't painless." Glynda shrugged. "After all these years I don't really remember the pain. You really shouldn't worry about it. It's a one time thing, it subsides rather quickly, and then you never have to worry about it."

"I know...but...that's not the only issue." Pyrrha groaned. "I guess it's a fear of the unknown. I don't know what it'll be like to have sex with a man."

"Pyrrha, you know the best way to deal with a phobia." Glynda declared.

"I know, I know, face it head on." Pyrrha nodded. "But it's hard."
"I'm aware of that, and there's no reason to rush things." Glynda said. She smirked. "Also, that's what she said."

"Raven has been a very bad influence." Pyrrha laughed. "I guess...I just wanted to talk it over with you. I don't want to rush into this. It's far too important to take lightly."

"You're right about that." Glynda confirmed. "So Sun's agreed to this?"

"No, not yet." Pyrrha replied. "Not that Nora or I have pressed."

"Have you made your decision?" Glynda asked.

"I'm leaning toward yes, but I haven't decided yet." Pyrrha answered.

"Whatever you decide, whenever you decide, I'll support you." Glynda said. "Nora and Sun will too. Just don't feel pressured."

"I don't...well...except by myself." Pyrrha sighed. "I want to make Nora happy. I want to get over my irrational fears. I'm just...I'm not sure."

"I'm here to talk anytime." Glynda said with a gentle smile.

"I know." Pyrrha said. "Thank you."

--

On Wednesday Sun had a lighter schedule of classes to teach at the gym, so he headed to Solstice HQ to do the Spruce Lee tribute shoot he had talked about with Pyrrha. When he got there Pyrrha was waiting and everything was already set. May had her camera prepared in front of the green screen and chatted with Pyrrha. "Hey Pyrrha, where's Nora?" Sun asked.

"She kept hitting on May so I sent her off to get something to eat with Yang." Pyrrha replied.

"I can't believe she'd risk missing this." Sun laughed.

"She doesn't actually know why we're here." Pyrrha admitted. "I wanted it to be a surprise."

"Why is there a bottle of baby oil?" Sun asked with unease.

"That's a surprise for you." Pyrrha smirked. "Put on your costume and get back out here."

"Costume?" Sun asked.

"Here you go." Pyrrha said. She tossed him a paper bag.

Sun opened the bag and reached inside. "This is a speedo." Sun observed.

"Yep." Pyrrha confirmed. "You wanted to match the poster, right?"

"Are you doing this just to get a good look at my body?" Sun accused.

"I've seen it already." Pyrrha reminded him. "Just get dressed."

Sun retreated to a changing room, put on the speedo and returned. "How do I look?" He asked.

"Oh my..." May gasped.
"You look good." Pyrrha said. "Now oil up those abs."

"Why?" Sun asked.

"You want to look all shiny right?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, but I could just get sweaty." Sun protested. "Or you could spray me down with some water."

"Won't show up as well on camera." May said.

"I...well fine." Sun sighed. He grabbed the bottle and oiled up. "Good?"

"Perfect." Pyrrha said. "What do you think May?" No response. "May?"

"Ah...good!" May gasped, quickly wiping the drool from her chin. "Let's get started."

--

"And what do we have here?!" Nora burst in, followed by Yang.

"Hey Nora." Pyrrha said. "Just wrapping up Sun's shoot."

"Why was I not informed of this?" Nora demanded.

"I wanted it to be a surprise." Pyrrha replied.

"You get Sun oiled up and leave me out?!" Nora shouted.

"Can you blame her?" Yang asked. "They needed to get work done."

"Fair point." Nora shrugged.

"I've got all the shots we need." May said. "Are we done?"

"Nora, have any requests?" Sun asked.

Nora grinned maliciously. "Oh, I certainly do."

--

Once Nora's special portion of the shoot was done, Sun toweled off the oil while May packed up her gear. "Hey Greased Lightning, got a minute?" Yang asked.

"Sure, sup?" Sun responded.

"In private." Yang said. She headed into the dressing room and Sun followed, closing the door behind him. "How are things?"

"Good, was hanging with Nora and Pyrrha all weekend." Sun replied. "It's been fun."

"No...issues?" Yang pressed.

"None at all." Sun shrugged. "Except Nora constantly dragging Pyrrha off to bang."

"Heh, good, good." Yang laughed. "What about you?"

"I'm fine." Sun insisted.
"Have you been thinking things through?" Yang asked.

"No." Sun answered.

"What?!" Yang gasped. "No?! Sun! This is serious!"

"I know." Sun smirked. "I'm not thinking things through because I already thought things through."

"Already?" Yang asked skeptically.

"Mhmm, the day they asked me." Sun confirmed.

"That fast?" Yang pressed. "Sun, are you sure you've thought things through?"

"Well, there's a lot to think about obviously." Sun said. "Most obvious was 'holy fuck, I might have a kid.' Will I be a dad or some sort of uncle? Am I the right person to be either of those things? But then I realized that those were stupid things to worry about. Nora made it clear that to her, my role was up to me, and considering I've been taking care of her, plus the kids I teach to jump on and off dangerous shit for years now, if I can manage that without fucking up, maybe I could be a good dad or father figure or something."

"So you're not afraid of being a father?" Yang asked.

"Not really, no." Sun replied. "What I'm really worried about is how this will change our relationships. Nora is my best friend, and I love her, and she loves me, and we both know that, everyone knows that. It wouldn't take much to go from best friends love to Boop love, and that is what I'm worried about. Because while I'm okay with the idea, I'm not okay with Pyrrha not being okay with it, because she's a little insecure and kind of possessive as a result. There's nothing wrong with that. This could...hell...it will change all our lives, for better or worse. Pyrrha loves Nora, from the beginning she's been focused on taking care of her, making her happy. And she said it herself, she's not entirely comfortable with the situation, but for Nora's sake she's giving it a chance. It could royally fuck things up if I just out and say yes, because Pyrrha would pressure herself into this. She'll make herself okay with it, whether she really is or not, just to make Nora happy."

"You've really thought about this." Yang said. "I'm surprised to be honest."

"As a fellow dumb blonde I figured you would understand our secret intelligence." Sun joked.

"Hah, sure, whatever." Yang laughed. "So what's your plan?"

"I'm gonna' wait." Sun replied. "I'm gonna' spend as much time with them as possible, make sure Pyrrha is really comfortable with me. Eventually she'll make some sort of decision, and if I think she's really sure about it, I'll say yes, then we'll go from there."

"Well...good." Yang breathed a sigh of relief. "That's a really big load off my mind."

"Hah, you had that little faith in me?" Sun laughed.

"You're a dumbass Wukong, and most of the time I love that about you." Yang joked. "But this...God, this is big and scary. Pyrrha and Nora are like family. And if that weird dream I had about Raven marrying Glynda and adopting Nora comes true, and Nora and Pyrrha get married, they will be family. I just wanted to be sure you're on the same page as me."

"You've been going over this too?" Sun asked.
"Yep, I love you guys, and I worry." Yang replied. "Because if this goes bad it'll cause a lot of pain no one deserves."

"Well, I'm doing everything I can to not fuck this up." Sun assured her. "No pressure, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, no pressure." Yang laughed. "So, how did you decide?"

"Ah, well, after thinking a bunch I called up Sage." Sun explained. "He's always been smarter than me, so I figured he was the guy to ask. He said I should jack off, then make a decision. So I did."

--

"Were you and Yang Booping in the changing room?" Nora accused when the pair emerged.

"No, she was just helping me towel the oil off my back." Sun said. "I still can't believe we did that."

"And I can't believe May actually took the pictures." Nora giggled. "I can't wait to get the prints. I think I'll hang it in the longue."

"Pyrrha?" Sun said.

"She's pretty set on this." Pyrrha shrugged. "I guess we have a new discussion piece for the living room."

--

Sun spent the rest of the week much as he had the first half. He ate lunch with Nora and Pyrrha each day and spent as much time with them as possible. He and Pyrrha had their jobs, but there were some free moments they could all spend together. On Friday night they all headed to Nora's house. The entire Spruce Lee Collection had long since been exhausted, including most of the commentary tracks. So after dinner they played some videogames instead. Pyrrha was still not good, but she was at least no longer disastrously bad, and though Sun and Nora definitely carried her, they managed to make some good progress.

Their gaming done, a sleepy Nora stumbled off to the bedroom to get changed for bed. Pyrrha packed up the gaming gear with Sun. "I guess it's time for me to head home." Sun said. "I don't feel like another night on the couch."

"That doesn't mean you have to leave." Pyrrha said. "Why don't you uh...take the bed?"

"Is the spare room clean?" Sun asked.

"No, I mean…" Pyrrha started.

"I wouldn't want to force you guys out." Sun cut in.

"No, Sun...would you...would you like to join Nora and I?" Pyrrha asked.

"Uh, wait you mean…" Sun started.

"Sun, would you like to sleep in our bed, with us, tonight?" Pyrrha asked straight out.

"Are you okay with that?" Sun asked.

"I...I am." Pyrrha confirmed. "We've spent the whole week trying to see if this will work. I figure this is the logical next step."
"If you're 100% sure." Sun said.

"I am." Pyrrha nodded.

"Alright then." Sun agreed. "Nora's going to be over the moon."

"Until she falls asleep." Pyrrha laughed. "There's nothing, nothing that can keep that girl awake after midnight."

"Isn't this exciting!" Nora cheered. "Even if I do have to wear clothes." Nora generally slept in the nude, but for this special case she borrowed a set of panties from Pyrrha and a singlet top.

"I know the temptation would be too great if you were naked." Pyrrha said. She dressed for sleep as she always did, in panties and a singlet top. She lay flat on her back, staring at the ceiling. On the other side of Nora, Sun lie there in his boxers, tense and unsure like Pyrrha.

"Come on you two, snuggle up!" Nora encouraged. She reached out her hands, grabbing Pyrrha's shoulders. "Pyrrha, hug me." Pyrrha hesitated but obliged, rolling onto her side and sliding into Nora's embrace. Nora reached back with her free hand. "Come on Sun, spoon me."

"Nora, I don't know if…" Sun protested.

"Spoon me!" Nora demanded. Sun sighed and rolled up against Nora's backside. "See? Much better?"

"You guys are both sure about this?" Sun asked.

"I...I am." Pyrrha said with a nod hidden from Sun by Nora's head.

"Come on guys, loosen up!" Nora demanded. She pressed her backside into Sun, rubbing against him.

"Nora, can you please not?" Sun sighed.

"What's the matter Sunny Jim?" Nora laughed. "Can't handle a little friction?"

Sun just grumbled to himself. "Nor-AH!" Pyrrha tried to admonish Nora but gasped as Nora bit her nipple.

"I'm a Nora sandwich!" Nora exclaimed. "My dream has come true!"

"Well...as long as you're happy." Pyrrha said as she pushed Nora's head away from her chest. "Now hush, it's time to sleep."

"Oh fine…" Nora sighed. "Goodnight you two."

"Goodnight Nora." Pyrrha said. "Goodnight Sun."

Sun smiled. "Goodnight ladies."
Pyrrha awoke to feel a weight on her arm and breath on the top of her head. She lifted her head to look Nora in the eyes and only just managed to avoid screaming when she saw it was Sun. It took her a few seconds to process the situation but she was quickly able to calm down. Nora had probably been the first one to wake up, then had slipped out without waking Sun or herself. Sun was pretty cute when he was sleeping, messy hair and drool included. Still a bit tired and discouraged from getting up by the room's cold air, Pyrrha snuggled into Sun as he unconsciously reached out and embraced her, and soon she fell back to sleep.

Some time later Sun woke up. He felt hair against his chest and an arm draped over him. He opened his eyes, expecting Nora, but got Pyrrha instead. "Pyrrha!" He gasped, somehow keeping his exclamation a whisper. "Shit…" Pyrrha was probably not going to be thrilled about them ending up this close. And where was Nora? Click. Sun raised his head a bit to see Nora standing at the foot of the bed, grinning ear to ear. She had her phone out and was snapping pictures. No doubt she had engineered the situation on purpose.

"Hey, I'm really sorry…" Sun started.

"There's nothing to apologize for." Pyrrha cut him off. "Waking up in your arms was a surprisingly enjoyable experience."

"Aw...so cute." Nora squealed.

"So you're not mad?" Sun asked.

"No, not at all." Pyrrha confirmed. "And...I think I have my answer." Pyrrha sat up and looked Nora in the eyes. Nora lowered her phone. "Nora, Sun...yes."

"Awesome!" Nora cheered.

"And I want to be a part of it." Pyrrha continued. "If this is happening, it's going to be with all three of us."

"Sweet!" Nora exclaimed. "Three-way!"

"Yes Nora, three-way." Sun asked. Pyrrha nodded. "Completely?" Pyrrha nodded again. "Well, I guess this is happening."
"Are you certain?" Pyrrha asked.

"Oh yeah." Sun said. "I made my choice a while ago. Didn't want to influence your decision though."

"That's very thoughtful." Pyrrha smiled. "Thank you."

"Nah, it's the least I could do." Sun shook his head.

"So, shall we get this party started?!" Nora asked as she whipped off her shirt.

"Sorry Nora, but it'll have to wait." Sun declined. "I have a class to teach in an hour and I don't want to rush this. You're both welcome to attend if you'd like."

"I'd love to." Pyrrha agreed.

"I'll pass." Nora sighed. "I'll let this be your thing."

"Sun and I...have a thing?" Pyrrha asked.

"I guess so." Sun laughed.

"That's...pretty cool." Pyrrha chuckled. "Hopefully I don't forcefully embrace the concrete this week."

"I gotta call Yang!" Nora exclaimed. "I can brag again." She skipped out of the room, leaving Sun and Pyrrha alone. They shared a laugh before falling into a comfortable silence.

"You're really ready for this?" Sun asked after some time had passed.

"Ready?" Pyrrha sighed. "Not entirely." She leaned against Sun who slid his left arm around her waist. She took his right hand in her own. "There are a few things we'll need to talk about, things we'll need to work through, but I do want this Sun. I'm confident in that now. Together we can make this work." She faced Sun, smiling warmly, cupped his cheek with her left hand before closing in for a kiss.

Pyrrha had a great time at the parkour class, and managed to avoid any serious falls. She signed up to attend regularly, and though Sun was against it, she insisted on paying like everyone else. After a quick change of clothes the pair headed out, picking up some food on the way home. When they arrived they were in for a surprise. Rose petals scattered on the floor made a path from the front door to the bedroom. Sun diverted to leave the food in the kitchen before rejoining Pyrrha at the bedroom door.

"Well, I think it's safe to say Nora's eager." Pyrrha joked.

"I'm almost afraid to see what she has in store." Sun said.

Pyrrha pushed the door open to see Nora reclining, nude, on a bed covered with red satin sheets. Candles burned all around the room. "Welcome back." Nora smirked. "Let's make a baby."

"Nora...we don't own satin sheets." Pyrrha observed.

"I called in a favor from Yang and Winter." Nora explained.
Sun sniffed the air. "Banana?" He gasped. "Seriously?"

"I also got strawberry and mint!" Nora cheered. "They make so many kinds of scented candle, I couldn't choose just one! Now come on. Drop those pants and let's get this show on the road."

"Nora, slow down." Pyrrha requested.

"Aw...well...oh!" Nora gasped. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to rush things." She jumped up and started around the room, blowing out the candles.

"It's alright." Pyrrha smiled. "I probably should have said something to you this morning."

"I'm still sorry." Nora said.

"Don't be." Pyrrha said. "Now, we brought lunch. We can talk about things over a nice meal."

"Sweet!" Nora cheered. Without putting on any clothes, she rushed for the kitchen.

"She's going to eat naked, isn't she?" Sun asked.

Pyrrha laughed. "You have no idea how hard it is to get that girl to put clothes on."

Pyrrha sat in the middle of the couch, Sun and Nora on either side of her, holding her hands. "I have a...a fear of...penetration." Pyrrha admitted.

"Oh shit!" Nora exclaimed. "I forgot!"

"Well, to be fair, I never told you it was a fear." Pyrrha said. "Just that I didn't like it as much as...other things, and it's more focused on...well male penetration."

"O-oh!" Nora gasped. "Pyrrha, you don't have to..."

"But I do!" Pyrrha protested. "God I want to! I don't want this stupid phobia ruling me, just another shadow my parents cast over me even now."

"Pyrrha, breathe." Sun advised.

Pyrrha took a few deep breaths to calm herself, pulling Sun and Nora closer as she did. "Of all the things they did, all the lies, all the insecurities they fostered in me, this is the most...humiliating." Pyrrha's voice cracked and intensified as she continued, tears welling in her eyes. "I was terrified during high school. Then, when I finally got away from them in college, and finally had a relationship, I was too scared to ask for sex, and he lacked the confidence to do it himself. It was a nightmare. I was too scared to even pleasure myself. I spent so much time aroused and unable to do anything about it. I was terrified of putting a fucking tampon in for crying out loud!" The crying and wavering was gone, replaced by anger and yelling. "Don't touch yourself, it's dirty Pyrrha! Don't bleed on the sheets Pyrrha! Don't ever have sex Pyrrha, it's painful and you'll catch a disease! Well isn't that a lovely thing to tell a fourteen year old?!"

"Pyrrha..." Nora started. She and Sun wrapped Pyrrha in a closer embrace as she sobbed.

"I'm done letting them hurt me." Pyrrha declared. "I love you Nora, and Sun, I know in time I'll love you too. I want to do this, I want to heal. I just need to prepare myself first. I don't know how long it'll take, but I'll get there. I promise."
"So no touching?" Nora asked.

"Maybe a little," Pyrrha chuckled. "Baby steps and all that."

"Heh, literal baby steps." Sun laughed.

"First Yang and Nora, now you with the puns?" Pyrrha laughed. "How will my sanity survive?"

They all laughed before settling into a comfortable silence. Pyrrha wiped her tears on her sleeve.

"Hey, Pyrrha...I thought you were okay with masturbation when we met." Nora said.

"Ah, yes..." Pyrrha sighed. "Well, Glynda helped me a lot when we met, including setting me straight about that sort of thing...she also bought me a vibrator..."

"I'm having a very hard time picturing that." Sun shook his head.

"Emphasis on hard!" Nora cheered.

"God, you two..." Pyrrha giggled.

"Was it that little ball massage I found in your sock drawer?" Nora asked.

"Nora!" Pyrrha gasped. "...yes."

Sun decided to stay at Nora's house for the time being. He made a quick trip home to pack a bag of clothes and other things he would need before returning. In the meantime Pyrrha had told Nora about her kiss with Sun. Nora demanded kisses of her own, kisses she soon received. Over the next few days she would continue kissing both of them, seemingly at random. When it came time to shower Nora tried to drag both of them in with her, but Sun did not feel right joining her. Out of respect for Sun, Pyrrha did not join Nora either. Nora did manage to talk them into letting her sleep in the nude, even though Sun would again share the bed.

On Sunday Nora insisted the trio go shopping. She wanted her house to seem more homey for Sun, and the shopping trip would provide the chance to get a few things to help with that. That night they shared the bed again, as they would continue to do over the next few days. It was all beginning to seem more natural and comfortable. On Monday and Tuesday both Sun and Pyrrha had jobs to go to. Things went back to the old normal to a degree, but Nora was even more over the moon than usual. On Wednesday they would finally get another opportunity to spend more time together. In the afternoon Pyrrha had no appointments, and Sun had only one class to teach, which he passed off to Sage just this once.

Over the previous few days the trio had been ramping up their intimacy. It took several forms, increased and more intense making out, lots of physical contact and wandering hands. There was only one last step to take, but it was a large and precipitous one, and once taken there would be no going back. Nora had been ready from the beginning and was eager to go, particularly given that Pyrrha had stopped their sex to avoid causing Sun to feel left out. Having made his decision, Sun was ready. That just left Pyrrha.

Sun's back slammed against the front door as Pyrrha hungrily attacked his lips, her hands clenching his shirt. Sun cupped her rear with one hand and fumbled for the door with the other. It opened before he could locate the knob, and he very nearly fell backwards into Nora. She latched onto the
pair, Pyrrha barely missing a beat as she shifted her kiss from Sun to Nora. The trio slowly shuffled in, unwilling to split up, a mess of groping hands and labored breaths. Nora shifted her lips to Sun's as Pyrrha trailed kisses down Nora's neck.

Pyrrha suddenly pulled away. "Sun, Nora...I'm ready." She declared.

"Really?" Nora cheered.

"You're sure?" Sun asked.

Pyrrha kissed both in turn before nodding shakily. "I am." She said, her voice cracking. "I am. I want to do this. I-I just need some help."

"We'll take things slowly." Sun promised.

"I'll get the room ready!" Nora exclaimed before rushing into the bedroom.

Pyrrha smiled, more strongly this time. "Pyrrha..." Sun started.

"Sun, I do want this." Pyrrha assured him. "I promise. Right now my body really wants this, wants you Sun. I'm ready, just a little scared."

Pyrrha pulled Sun into a tight embrace as Sun ran his fingers through her hair. He lightly tugged her hair to pull her head up so he could look her in the eyes. "You've got nothing to be scared of here." Sun encouraged. "We're gonna' take things slow and gentle, and if at any point you wanna' stop we will, no questions asked. Okay?"

"Okay." Pyrrha nodded. "I can do this. We can do this."

"Sex nest ready!" Nora yelled from the bedroom.

"Ready?" Sun asked.

Pyrrha smiled. "As I'll ever be."

"How did I get into this position?" Pyrrha groaned. She sat on the bed nude, an equally naked Nora pressed up against her back, a disrobed and erect Sun standing before her.

"Well, we were making out, then I sat behind you, and spread your legs." Nora answered.

"Nora...it's staring at me." Pyrrha complained, not sure if she should look at Sun's erection or avert her eyes.

"It's just a dick Pyrrha." Nora laughed. "Say hello."

"H-hello?" Pyrrha stammered as Nora stifled a giggle.

"Touch it." Nora encouraged. "Touch the dick."

Pyrrha whined as she reached a trembling hand to grasp Sun's length. She ran her fingers over it, feeling the texture of his skin. "This is...really weird." Sun sighed.

"And yet you remain erect." Nora observed.
"It's a good kinda' weird." Sun chuckled.

Pyrrha's face turned beet red. "Isn't it so tiny and cute?" Nora squealed.

"It's huge!" Pyrrha exclaimed.

"Thank you!" Sun said.

"Pshh." Nora scoffed.

"It's scary." Pyrrha sighed.

"It won't hurt you." Nora assured her.

"But everyone says it does the first time." Pyrrha countered.

"Mine was painless, and it was with Ren!" Nora declared.

"Forgive me for not trusting your perception of pain." Pyrrha huffed. "I...I thought they were supposed to have extra…"

"Sadly he's the runt of the litter." Nora teased.

"She's talking about foreskin Nora." Sun groaned.

"Well that too." Nora shrugged.

Pyrrha ran her hand up to the tip and Sun flinched. "Ah!" He gasped. "Gentle, it's sensitive."

"So...like a clitoris?" Pyrrha asked.

"Exactly, except with a small shaft to massage you with." Nora added.

"That's...interesting…" Pyrrha said.

"I'm not small Nora." Sun countered. "Ren was just freakishly huge."

"God yes he was…" Nora reminisced.

Pyrrha carefully ran her hand along and squeezed the tip. "It's spongy." She giggled.

Sun shook his head. "Funny thing is I've had stranger sex." He laughed.

"Haven't we all?" Nora joked.

"No." Pyrrha said flatly.

"Pyrrha, how are you feeling?" Nora asked.

"A little less worried." Pyrrha replied. "I...I think we should try now."

"You sure?" Sun asked.

"Positive." Pyrrha confirmed.

"Alright, let's start with some rubbing then." Nora suggested.
"O-okay…" Pyrrha stammered. She let go of Sun, taking Nora's hand instead. Sun gently rubbed the head of his penis against Pyrrha's lips. She tensed up, whimpering and Nora kissed Pyrrha on the cheek, murmuring words of encouragement in her ear. Pyrrha's whimpering turned into small squeaks as her anxiety faded and pleasure took its place. She lay her head back, her breath growing heavier. "Sun…"

"Is this okay?" Sun asked.

"Yeah…" Pyrrha gasped. "W-we can try…"

"You wanna' try and go in?" Nora asked.

Pyrrha nodded, clenching Nora's hand harder. "I'm ready." Pyrrha declared. Sun adjusted his angle, slowly pushing the tip in. Pyrrha jerked, grunting, and Sun slowly eased in as Pyrrha relaxed somewhat, only for her to jerk again when Sun encountered an obstruction. 'Th-that's my…"

"It's okay, just wait a minute." Nora soothed. "Try and get used to the feeling. If you think you can't, if you want to stop, we still can."

Pyrrha nodded and worked on slowing her breathing. Nora trailed gentle kisses along Pyrrha's neck as Sun massaged her thighs. Pyrrha took a deep, shuddering breath, before closing her eyes.

"Now." Pyrrha nodded. She yelped then groaned as Sun pushed himself in. She wrapped her legs around him and arched her back. Pyrrha squeaked as she felt Sun move slightly within her, then felt a small smile grow across her face. "I…I did it!"

"You okay?" Sun asked. "Does it hurt?"

"A-a little." Pyrrha replied. "It's not sharp anymore though. It's...it's like an ache, but it's fading. This feels...warm."

"It's 'cuz his blood's pumpin'!" Nora cheered. "It's what makes him hard."

"Yeah, yeah, I remember." Pyrrha said. "Sun?"

"Yeah?" Sun asked.

Pyrrha released Nora's hand and Sun shifted to lean lower, allowing her to cup his face, pulling him in for a long kiss. "R-ready?" She asked.

"Yeah." Sun nodded. "Nora?"

"Buckled in." Nora smirked.

Pyrrha chuckled and Sun grinned before pulling out. Pyrrha tensed, gasping slightly as he pushed back in. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him in close, every thrust drawing more and more vocal expression of her pleasure. Sun increased his speed and power as Pyrrha's volume increased. "Pyrrha I'm…" Sun started, cut off by her building moans.

Nora's hands wandered, massaging and teasing Pyrrha's breasts before she reached a hand down between her legs to toy with her clit. Pushed over the edge, Pyrrha let out a cry, wrapping herself around Sun as tightly as possible as her orgasm sent shudders of bliss through her body. She became vaguely aware of the warmth pooling in her pelvis, but as her orgasm faded exhaustion began to set in. She felt herself slowly fading away.
"Oh God, is she alright?" Sun gasped. Unnerving did not begin to describe the situation. Pyrrha orgasmed, Sun orgasmed, then after having him wrapped up so tightly, Pyrrha just went limp.

"She'll be fine." Nora assured him as she slipped out from beneath Pyrrha. "She did the same thing the first time we did it."

"Uhn...Nora..." Pyrrha groaned.

"See, she's fine." Nora declared. "Hey sleepy head."

Pyrrha sat up. "Hey...what...did I pass out again?" She asked.

"Yep, scared poor Sun half to death." Nora confirmed. "How are you feeling?"

"Great...I love it when that happens." Pyrrha smiled.

"All thanks to my magic fingers." Nora laughed, holding up her hands and wiggling her fingers.

"Sun...you look...concerned." Pyrrha observed. "Are you alright?"

"Just a little worried about you." Sun replied. "I've never had...that...happen before. And um...I kind of uh...I came in you. I'm really sorry. I tried to pull out but you had me wrapped up pretty tight."

"Don't worry about it." Pyrrha shook her head.

"Yeah, we'll just get some morning-after pills." Nora suggested.

"Good idea." Pyrrha agreed. "Just to be safe. From now on we should probably use a condom too."

"Well...is there anything I can get you now?" Sun asked.

"No, I'm okay." Pyrrha answered. "Just...really tired. I think I'll run to the bathroom then take a nap."

"Alright." Sun said. "I'll need a break anyway. Mind grabbing me a towel while you're in there? I still don't feel right walking around your house naked."

"No problem." Pyrrha said. After a short trip to the bathroom Pyrrha returned with the promised towel. She passed it to Sun. "I'm...just give me an hour."

"Sure thing." Sun nodded. Pyrrha flopped down on the bed, falling asleep almost as soon as she made contact.

Sun and Nora left the bedroom, Sun quietly shutting the door behind himself before he followed Nora to the living room. Nora jumped onto the couch and giggled, rubbing her hand between her legs. "You know, there are a lot of ways we can pass the time." Nora smirked.

"I'm still gonna' need a while Nora." Sun reminded her.

"Junior might, but you've still got your hands...and your tongue." Nora persisted. "You're not selfish are you? Gonna' leave little ol' me all pent up?"

"Oh, like I've been every night this week?" Sun countered.

"You could have gotten naked too!" Nora protested.
"Someone had to take mercy on Pyrrha." Sun joked.

"Oh, she would have loved it." Nora laughed. "She usually ends up sleepin' naked anyway...after I'm finished with her."

Sun headed to the kitchen and grabbed two bottles of water. Nora moved to the edge of the couch, allowing Sun to sit beside her. He passed her one of the bottles and started downing the other. After a few big gulps he looked over at Nora who was in the process of giving him her patented puppydog eyes. "What?" Sun asked.

"I'm really horny." Nora replied.

Sun laughed and put his arm around Nora's shoulders. "Come here."
Pyrrha stirred as the bed shifted. With a groan she was drawn from her slumber as a gentle hand rubbed circles on her back. "Hey there sleeping beauty." Nora smiled down at her.

"Hmm...feels good." Pyrrha said.

"Good, you've been very brave today." Nora encouraged.

"You make me want to be." Pyrrha smiled up at Nora.

"You're gonna' make me blush." Nora said as, sure enough, she blushed.

"You two are adorable." Sun laughed.

"We're having a moment!" Nora huffed. "Shut-up!"

Pyrrha rolled onto her back. Beside her she saw Sun sitting on the side opposite Nora, the towel still wrapped around his waist. "Are you ready to continue?" Pyrrha asked.

"Ready or not, Nora's chomping at the bit." Sun observed.

"Nora…" Pyrrha admonished.

"Guilty!" Nora giggled. "He's been such a gentleman though. He made me cum twice, and even let me ride him a little."

"She's like a cat in heat." Sun joked.

"Mhm, get used to it." Pyrrha agreed.

Nora shifted to straddle Pyrrha, and excited smile on her face. "Can we keep going now?" She asked.

"As long as Sun's ready." Pyrrha replied.

"Her enthusiasm is infectious." Sun smirked.

"I want a baby!" Nora cheered.

"Alright, alright, come on Sun." Pyrrha laughed. "Do your job."

"And do it hard!" Nora demanded. "I wanna' pass out too!"

"Have mercy Nora." Pyrrha said.

"Psh, no mercy for the-AH!" Nora gasped as Sun roughly pushed into her from behind. "Yes! That's what I'm talking about! I can almost feel yo-UGH!"

Sun spanked her harshly. "Not the best idea to taunt the guy bangin' ya'." Sun advised.
"I see no evidence to support that claim, lover boy." Nora countered. She thrust back into Sun, almost knocking him off balance. Nora giggled before kissing Pyrrha passionately. Suddenly jerked forward, she buried her face in Pyrrha's shoulder as she moaned. "Harder!" Sun obliged, his hips slamming against Nora's rear. She whined and giggled between the love bites and licks she left on Pyrrha's neck. Pyrrha wrapped her arms around Nora's back. "Pyr-HAH! G-getting close!"

"Sun?" Pyrrha said.

"Almost!" Sun gasped. Pyrrha reached up to pull Sun down into a kiss. At the same time Nora let out a moan and squeezed Pyrrha as she reached her peak.

"God yes!" Nora moaned. She suddenly kneeled upright, her entire body shaking, to reach up and grasp at Sun. He wrapped his arms around her midsection, gasping as he slammed harder into her. "C-come on Sun! Come on!" Sun grunted, slamming into her one more time before tensing, his second climax of the day hitting him. Nora moaned, breathing heavily, and fell forward, resting on Pyrrha's chest as they caught their breath. Sun started to shift but Nora grabbed him. "No, no, don't pull out. Leave it in, stay...hng...God I missed this."

"I can't feel my legs." Sun panted.

"How do you think I felt?" Pyrrha laughed.

"I'll make it up to you later." Sun laughed breathlessly.

"Oh!" Nora exclaimed. "We can shower together!"

"Hah, yes Nora, we can shower together." Pyrrha confirmed.

"And I can brag about it to Ya-AH!" Nora yelled as Sun shifted. "Sun, careful. I'm sensitive."

"Just trying to get comfy." Sun said. "My legs are killing me."

"Don't you run and jump for a living?" Pyrrha asked.

"Somehow less taxing than this." Sun joked.

"Well, it is Nora." Pyrrha giggled.

"Damn right it is." Nora said proudly.

"So what now?" Sun asked.

"Pizza?" Nora suggested after they thought for a moment.

"Pizza sounds good." Sun agreed.

"And garlic bread." Pyrrha added.

Nora chuckled. "The perfect after-sex food."

--

Pyrrha arrived at her office before Glynda did. As she usually did, she sat at her desk in the waiting room to do some paperwork ahead of the first sessions of the day. When Glynda arrived Pyrrha was still doing just that. The only thing out of the ordinary was the ear to ear smile plastered on her face. "You finally pulled the trigger, huh?" Glynda laughed.
"Is it that obvious?" Pyrrha asked.

"I don't think I've ever seen you smile like this." Glynda observed.

"I finally did it!" Pyrrha cheered. "They can't hold me back anymore. I can be myself! I can never thank you enough Glynda, I could never have come this far without you."

"No, I only gave you a little guidance." Glynda shook her head. "You did all the hard work and you deserve all the credit. So, how was it?"

"A bit painful at first, but nothing like what I was expecting." Pyrrha replied. "I was really tense and nervous but once we got going...it was wonderful. I haven't felt that good since my first time with Nora."

"Glad to hear it went well." Glynda smiled.

"Yeah...I can't wait to do it again." Pyrrha blushed. "Hopefully I won't pass out next time."

Sun stayed with Pyrrha and Nora through the weekend, and they had sex nightly. More careful now, Sun wore a condom for Pyrrha. For Nora his repeated efforts were meant to ensure she fell pregnant. During those few days she would be at peak fertility, and the time would not be wasted. After they finished up on Sunday night, Sun headed home. Following days of exertion he needed a good rest, one most likely to be found in his own bed. If Nora failed to become pregnant, they would try again in a month or so, but until then his work was done.

On Monday Nora was called in to Solstice to do some modeling. When she arrived, May was taking a series of photos of Winter for a businesswear shoot. Nora joined Yang to wait in the break room. Once Winter was done they would pose for some promo shots for a fitness company. In modeling, as in everything else she did, Winter was a perfectionist, so it could be a long wait before Nora and Yang had their turn. Yang sipped some iced tea while Nora guzzled a bottle of soda.

"You look happy." Yang observed. "You finally bang Sun or something?"

"Yep!" Nora cheered. She downed the rest of her soda and tossed the bottle toward the trash. It missed badly and bounced across the floor but Nora ignored it. "Pyrrha was finally ready."

"I was wondering when she'd finally go through with it." Yang said. "I knew she'd come around eventually. How was it?"

"For Pyrrha I think it was the best time she ever had." Nora laughed. "Except for maybe our first time. The orgasm hit her so hard she passed out. It made Sun kind of nervous but it was all good. Then when I had my turn...it was a really good time."

"Mind if I ask a weird question?" Yang asked.

"Never." Nora replied.

"How's Sun stack up?" Yang asked.

"Against Ren?" Nora shrugged. "He's nothin'. But he brings something different to the table, enough to make up for it...almost."

"Such as?" Yang inquired.
"Well, he laughs and jokes with me, and he's not afraid to be rough, or leave a mark, or two, or four, or more!" Nora exclaimed. "It's exciting. It's different. He's my best friend and I love him, but not the same way I loved Ren, so it isn't really fair to compare them."

"That was pretty deep Nora." Yang observed.

"Not as deep as Ren." Nora smirked.

"Boom!" Yang laughed hysterically.

"So what's new with you?" Nora asked.

"Not much." Yang shrugged. "Oh, but I am finally getting my tattoos finished."


"I don't think Blake would be happy with you getting one." Yang warned.

"Don't worry, I have ways of making her happy." Nora smirked.

"Remember, you have four people to convince now." Yang joked. "But hey, if you're willing to deal with the death stare she's going to give you…"

"I'm totally getting a tattoo." Nora declared. "Pyrrha's gonna' be so surprised!"

Yang laughed. "Oh, I bet she is."

--

Nora met up with Yang to go for tattoos and was surprised when Yang took her all the way to Patch. "Why did we come all the way out here?" Nora asked. "It's so far, and there's like a dozen parlors in the city."

"This is the place where I got all this done." Yang replied as she flexed her arm. "I wouldn't trust anyone else, and this way I don't have to worry about another artist being able to match the style."

"Oh, that makes sense." Nora said. "Hmm...I wonder what I should get."

"Take your time." Yang advised. "Tattoos are forever, so you should choose carefully."

Yang pushed through the door, ringing the attached bell. "Anybody home?" Yang called.

A petite girl with blue-streaked orange hair done up in pigtails emerged from a back room. "Hey Yang, long time, no see." The girl said. "Who's your friend?"

"Ah, Neon, meet Nora." Yang introduced. "Nora, Neon."

"Ooh, now I know why you really wanted to come back here." Nora teased. "She's a cutie."

"You're not bad yourself." Neon laughed.

"And we're both in committed relationships." Yang warned before things could spiral out of control.

"No fun, as always." Neon teased, sticking her tongue out at Yang. "So, you just want me to finish up your dragon?"

"Yep." Yang confirmed. "Oh, and I'd like a little butt tattoo as well if you don't mind. I have the
design here." Yang tapped at her phone until she found the picture she was looking for, then handed it to Neon.

"From one butt to another." Neon joked. "No problem. You know the drill. Get yourself settled in the back room." Yang nodded and headed in. "And how can I help you?"

"Uh...I'm not sure yet." Nora said as she looked at some of the example designs on the walls. "I'll figure it out while you work on Yang."

Yang lay face down, waiting for Neon to get to work. She was topless to allow Neon free access to her upper back. Nora followed Neon in and the latter set about preparing her equipment. "So Yang, how's that cute sister of yours?" Neon asked.

"She uh…" Yang started, clearly hesitant. Nora tensed up at the mention. "She...she didn't make it, Neon. Cancer."

"Oh...o-oh!" Neon gasped. "I'm...I'm so sorry."

"I'm...sorry I haven't talked to you in so long." Yang sighed. "I should have told you."

"No, no, it's okay!" Neon insisted. "It must have been...difficult. Are you...are you doin' okay?"

"Yeah, yeah I am." Yang replied. "I went through a really rough patch right after she passed, but I met some great people who helped me get my life on track."

--

It took hours for Neon to complete Yang's tattoos. By the time she was done the rose-sprouting dragon that had wrapped around Yang's arm extended across most of her upper back. After adding a crimson snowflake, identical in design to Winter's, to Yang's posterior, Neon also touched up Yang's existing tattoos so their colors matched those of the new and vibrant additions. Nora spent most of the time watching intently, at least when she was not bouncing around the parlor, looking at sample designs.

"Always a pleasure." Neon said as Yang got dressed.

"My girlfriend's gonna' flip when she sees I got a matching tattoo." Yang smirked.

"She's a lucky woman." Neon winked. "So, Nora, have you decided?"

"Um...I'm trying to get pregnant." Nora said. "If I get a skinny lady tattooed on my belly, will she get fat when I do?"

"That's not even close to how it works." Neon replied.

"Oh well…" Nora sighed. She thought for a moment. "Ooh! Maybe a heart. Yeah! A pink one, right in the center of my chest! I've been feelin' so full of love, I want to show it!"

"Nora, Blake won't be happy about that." Yang advised. "That's really visible. At least if you got something a bikini would cover she wouldn't have to deal with it."

"You know, some people get hearts tattooed on their nipples." Neon suggested.

"Neon no!" Yang gasped. But it was too late.

"That is so cool!" Nora cheered. "That's perfect! Nipple hearts it is!"
"Goddamn it." Yang sighed and shook her head. "Yep, go ahead Neon, give the lady what she wants."

"It might hurt, a lot." Neon warned.

"People are always telling me my sense of pain is skewed, so I wouldn't worry about that." Nora said.

"Fair enough." Neon shrugged. "Take you top off and sit in the chair." In an instant Nora was topless and she plopped down in her seat.

"I can't believe this is happening." Yang groaned. "Pyrrha's gonna' kill me."

--

Yang arrived at Nora's house. She wanted to just drop her off, but Nora insisted she come inside and say hello to Pyrrha. Yang reluctantly agreed. "I'm home!" Nora cheered as she walked in.

"Where were you?" Pyrrha asked in annoyance. "Don't you remember? We're supposed to have dinner with Sun tonight."

"Oh...sorry, I forgot." Nora said with an uneasy laugh.

"And Yang, why did you send me a text that says 'I'm sorry'?" Pyrrha continued.

"Well, Nora...who am I kidding?" Yang shook her head. "She'll just show you."

"Behold!" Nora exclaimed. She whipped off her shirt and bra, revealing the heart tattoos that ringed her nipples.

"You got tattoos...on your nipples…" Pyrrha sighed.

"Aren't they cool?!" Nora cheered.

"I'm really sorry." Yang apologized. "I tried to talk her out of it…"

"Hey, what's the commotion…" Sun started as he walked in. "Holy shit! Are those hearts?"

"They sure are!" Nora confirmed.

"That's the most adorable, hottest fucking thing I've ever seen!" Sun declared.

"I suppose they are rather cute." Pyrrha allowed. "Didn't it hurt though?"

"Nope." Nora replied. "It actually felt super-good."

"Well, if you're happy, I'm happy." Pyrrha smiled.

"Oh thank God, I'm off the hook." Yang breathed a sigh of relief.

Pyrrha glared at Yang. "Like hell you are."

--

After finishing up her shower, Nora dried off and headed for the bedroom. She arrived to find Pyrrha sitting on the edge of the bed, hands clasped in her lap. "Pyrrha, I think I'm pregnant!" Nora cheered. "My period is already like three days late!"
"Five." Pyrrha corrected. "It's five days late."

"How do you know?" Nora asked.

"We're synced up, remember?" Pyrrha answered.

"Oh yeah." Nora shrugged. "Is something wrong? You seem kind of tense."

"I didn't get mine either." Pyrrha replied.

"Huh?" Nora asked.

Pyrrha unclasped her hands to reveal a pregnancy test. "I figured I should check, just in case." She said, handing the test to Nora.

"Uh..." Nora struggled, not sure what to make of it.

"It's positive." Pyrrha explained. "I'm...I'm pregnant."

"Wha...how?" Nora gasped. "Sun always..."

"Not the first time." Pyrrha reminded her.

"Oh...right..." Nora sighed. "But you took that pill thingy!"

"I checked the box." Pyrrha said. "It says they're only 85% effective."

Nora did some quick math in her head. "15%, that's..." She started.

"Enough." Pyrrha groaned, starting to tremble. "Nora, what am I going to do?"

--

Sun was getting ready for bed when his phone rang. A call from Nora. She probably wanted to tell him one of her dirty jokes. He swiped across the screen to take the call. "Hey Nora, what's..." He started.

"Sun, we need you to come over as soon as possible." Nora cut him off.

Nora's tone was serious, more serious than Sun had ever heard from her. It was chilling. "Is everything okay?" He asked, afraid of the answer.

"No, everything is not okay." Nora replied.

"I'll be right there." Sun promised. Nora hung up without another word.

Sun rushed to the house Nora and Pyrrha shared. He had spent so much time there lately, so much great, fun time. As he walked up the path the front door opened to reveal Nora. To his surprise, though her hair was visibly damp from a recent shower, she was fully clothed. Nora never put clothes on after her nightly shower. Something was very wrong. "Sun...it's Pyrrha." Nora said before he could ask. "She's in the bedroom."

Sun followed Nora to the bedroom, finding Pyrrha seated at the edge of the bed, staring down at the floor. "Pyrrha?" Sun asked. No answer. He crouched down before her. "Pyrrha, talk to me. What's wrong?"
"I...I...I'm...pregnant." Pyrrha stammered.

"You're...but..." Sun gasped.

Suddenly Pyrrha looked up with fire in her eyes, tackling Sun to the floor. She started slapping his face, punching his chest, unleashing an uncoordinated and rage-fueled onslaught as Sun struggled to protect himself. "You bastard! I hate you! I'll kill you!" Pyrrha's angry grunts dissolved into sobs as tears streamed down her face. She stopped fighting and fell atop Sun. "Please don't leave me..."

"I...I won't." Sun struggled. "I promise." He gently embraced Pyrrha until she calmed down a bit, then helped her up to sit on the bed again. "It's gonna' be alright, okay?" He tried hugging her but she did not reciprocate. "It's okay, this isn't the end of the world. So Pyrrha's pregnant instead of Nora. No big deal..."

"I'm pregnant too." Nora said.

"You're..." Sun trailed off. "Oh...well...that's okay. Between the three of us...I'm sure we can..."

"What am I going to do?" Pyrrha sobbed. "I'm not ready for this." Sun had no good answer but both Pyrrha and Nora stared at him expecting one. "I don't know yet." Sun admitted. "But together I'm sure we'll figure it out. We'll get through this. We'll make it work."

"Can I...have some time...to myself?" Pyrrha asked.

"You said you didn't want me to leave..." Sun started.

"Just don't go far." Pyrrha requested. "Please, just give me a few minutes. I have to...think about some things. And I'm sorry for attacking you."

"Don't worry about it." Sun shook his head. "Take all the time you need." He and Nora left the bedroom. He sat down on the couch and Nora took a seat beside him. The shellshocked look on his face surely gave away the anxiety he was feeling.

"Sun, are you okay?" Nora asked.

"No Nora, I'm not okay." Sun replied. He lowered his head, grabbing either side with his hands. "What have I done?"

"Sun..." Nora started.

"I violated her." Sun groaned. "I violated her physically and I violated her trust. Yours too. God, this is all my fault."

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, this is not your fault." Nora insisted, leaning in and embracing Sun. "We were all a little silly and we had an accident, okay?"

"It's one hell of an accident Nora!" Sun shouted.

"Yep!" Nora shouted back. "And it's gonna' be tough, but we'll do what we do with all accidents and make the best of it." She took a deep breath and smiled. "But hey, I'm pregnant, so mission accomplished."

"You're terrible at this whole comforting thing." Sun sighed.
"You're smiling, aren't you?" Nora countered.

"Yeah." Sun shook his head. "Yeah, I am."
Glynda and Raven took a candle-lit bubble bath, with Glynda lying back against Raven's chest. Raven planted kisses along Glynda's neck, eliciting a sigh of contentment. The scene of loving relaxation was shattered as Glynda's phone rang. "Ugh, come on." Raven sighed.

"Be patient dear, I'm not going anywhere." Glynda declared. "But I have to take it in case it's an emergency." She dried her hand on a nearby towel before picking up her phone. After a quick glance she swiped the screen to accept. "Hello Nora."

"Glynda, emergency!" Nora exclaimed. "Pyrrha and I are pregnant, she's freaking out, and I need you here, please!"

"Oh...ho...okay, alright." Glynda sighed. "I'll be there soon. Should I bring anything?"

"Raven...and chocolate...maybe something Pyrrha likes." Nora suggested. "Anything to calm her down."

"Are you okay?" Glynda asked. "What about Sun, does he know?"

"I'm fine, don't worry." Nora replied. "Sun is freaking out but I'll handle him. Sorry, gotta' go!" She abruptly hung up.

Glynda took a deep breath. Between the maxed volume of the phone and Nora's loud speech, Raven had heard everything. "Fuuuuuuuck." Raven groaned.

Glynda shook her head. "Indeed."

--

Yang and Winter were playing video games together, Yang on her portable setup and Winter on the big screen. Winter had discovered a game focused around building with a simple blocky aesthetic. She found it stimulating and calming. As Winter set about building a gigantic mansion, Yang designed increasingly elaborate dicks. "Hey Winter." Yang called.

"No." Winter groaned.

"No, seriously, look." Yang implored.

"Yang, I swear to fucking God…" Winter grumbled.

"I rigged this one with bombs." Yang said.

"Fine, lovely...now where's the detonator?" Winter asked, taking the bait and looking at Yang's latest penile creation.

"What detonator?" Yang asked. Winter picked up a couch pillow and began smacking Yang with it. "I'm just giving you a hard time!" Yang laughed. The pun only inspired Winter to intensify the onslaught. It only stopped when Yang’s ringtone blared. "Winny, stop, I've got to get my phone."

"Ugh, fine." Winter sighed. "But this isn't over."
"We'll hold a tiebreaker later." Yang joked. "Heya Nora."

"Yang, we really need you here as soon as possible." Nora pleaded.

"What happened?" Yang gasped. "Is everyone okay?"

"Pyrrha and I are pregnant, Pyrrha and Sun are freaking out, and Glynda and Raven are on the way." Nora replied. "Need you and Winter too!"

"Oh fuck, seriously?" Yang groaned. "Okay, we're coming. Should we bring anything?"

"Bananas or something?" Nora suggested. "We need to keep Sun calm."

"Got it, we'll see you soon." Yang promised. "Love you."

"Love you too!" Nora declared before hanging up.

"What happened?" Winter asked.

"Nora and Pyrrha are pregnant." Yang replied. "Pyrrha and Sun aren't taking it well. Glynda and Raven are heading over too."

Winter shook her head in disbelief. "Oh for fuck's sake..."

--

Glynda drove to Nora's house with reckless abandon. She felt the need to go fast not only to get there as soon as possible, but to keep Raven from bailing out. For her part Raven sat in the passenger's seat in silence, staring blankly ahead. When Glynda screeched to a halt before the house Raven pressed herself hard into the seat, seemingly trying to dissolve into it rather than face the situation that awaited her. "Don't you dare make a run for it." Glynda warned.

"I was just hoping you'd forget about me." Raven sighed.

Glynda walked around the car and opened the door for Raven, offering her a hand. Raven took her hand and Glynda yanked her up out of the vehicle, holding on as they approached the door. Before they reached it Nora opened it up. Her appearance was troubling. She was fully dressed when she would normally have been nude, or at clad in far less at least. "Pyrrha's in the bedroom." Nora said.

"Got it." Glynda nodded. She pulled Raven along, heading straight for Pyrrha.

Glynda and Raven burst into the bedroom. "Mommy?" Pyrrha gasped as she spotted Glynda. Pyrrha's appearance was just as alarming as Nora's. When entertaining guests, Pyrrha always got at least a little dressed up, but she was wearing nothing but panties and a loose singlet top.

"It's okay sweetie, I'm here." Glynda smiled. She released Raven's hand and rushed to sit beside Pyrrha on the edge of the bed. "Everything's going to be alright." Raven slowly made her way over and sat on Pyrrha's other side.

"I'm so scared." Pyrrha sobbed, grasping at Glynda who pulled her into an embrace. Raven too embraced Pyrrha from the other side.

"I know, I know." Glynda soothed. "But everything's going to be fine. Tell me, how did this happen?"

"Our first time...we got a little ahead of ourselves." Pyrrha explained. "Sun didn't mean to, he really
didn't, I was just...I was wrapped around him and he couldn't...he finished in me. We weren't using protection and...I took a morning after pill but...they're only 85% effective and…"

"Okay, okay." Glynda said softly, stroking Pyrrha's hair. "It'll all work out, I promise."

"Some people take months to get pregnant." Pyrrha cried. "How did this happen the first time?"

"Hmm…” Glynda did some mental arithmetic. "It was on the 12th and your period is usually...you were ovulating."

"Ovulating?" Pyrrha gasped. "I'm an idiot. I screwed up, big time. How could I be so stupid?"

"You're not an idiot, you're not stupid." Glynda declared. "These things...sometimes these things just happen. The odds were astronomical."

"But it's all my fault." Pyrrha whined.

"No, it's not." Glynda countered. "There's plenty of blame to go around. And like I've always said, placing blame doesn't help."

"I know...I just…” Pyrrha struggled. "Why did this happen to me?"

"I can't answer that." Glynda admitted. "But I know you can get through this. We can get through this."

They sat there in near silence for a time, only Pyrrha's occasional sobs disturbing the peace. "I'm not ready." Pyrrha then wept. "I didn't want this." She buried her head in Glynda's shoulder. "I don't...I don't know what to do."

Raven did not want to be the bad guy, but someone had to be. "Pyrrha, are you considering what I think you are?" She asked. Pyrrha nodded glumly. "I'm not gonna' lie, for all you know, that could be the best decision."

"Raven!" Glynda gasped.

"Or the worst." Raven continued. "You're at a very hard turning point in your life. Either you can go through with this and risk crashing and burning in the future, or you abort and forever wonder 'what if?' Neither path will be easy. Either could destroy you...like me."

"I...Nora would want me…” Pyrrha started.

"Nora doesn't matter right now." Raven cut her off. "Pyrrha, what you want, focus on that first. This is your body, this is your choice, this is your life. Everyone else is secondary. If you don't believe you're ready, then that's that. Don't force yourself into something purely for the sake of others. Don't make that mistake...don't be me."

"I...thank you Raven." Pyrrha sighed. "I'm just really, really scared right now...terrified...and I...I think I want to do this, but I'm just not entirely sure. God this is messed up. I love them, I love both of them, and I could do this with them, I know I could. Sun would respect my decision and Nora would love having two children. She's holding back for my sake, she doesn't want to pressure me into anything else...and I can see it happening. It's just so...so…"

"It's okay Pyrrha." Glynda encouraged. "You don't have to say anything more."

"I love you two, both of you." Pyrrha sobbed. "You're the mothers I never had and I love you so
much."

With tears in her eyes, Raven swallowed a sob and lay her head on Pyrrha's back. "We love you too kiddo."

--

Nora opened the door as Winter and Yang approached. "Congrats." Yang said.

"Thanks, but just focus on Sun now." Nora ordered, guiding them toward the longue.

"What about Pyrrha?" Winter asked.

"Glynda and Rave are talking to her now." Nora replied. "So I think that's under control. I tried with Sun but I kind of suck at being encouraging."

"We'll take it from here." Yang declared. She strode into the lounge, standing before Sun who did not look up from the floor as he slumped on the couch. "I hear someone's gonna' be a dad!"

"Yang...not now, alright?" Sun sighed.

"Sorry...just...sorry." Yang apologized. Her usual approach was clearly not going to work.

"I don't know how, but even Nora is taking this seriously." Sun shook his head before looking up. "I think. Is she okay?"

"She seems calm, now." Winter replied. She sat beside Sun and put a hand on his shoulder. He shuddered but quickly relaxed, probably expecting a slap or punch rather than a gentle touch. "How exactly did this occur? I thought you were being safe."

"We have been." Sun groaned. "It's just the first time we were all pent up and excited and...we fucked up, but Pyrrha took a morning after pill, and we made sure we were safe after that, but apparently they aren't fully effective, and that one time was enough, and, fuck, fuck...I...I fucked up Winter! Pyrrha was so mad, then she was crying and begged me not to leave, then she asked to be alone. I've never seen her like this and...I don't know how to deal with this. I...I love her...and I hurt her...so much..."

"Sun, no." Yang said.

"Sun Wukong, look at me." Winter demanded, squeezing his shoulder a bit. "This was not something you could have foreseen, and while Pyrrha may be angry, she will not hold a grudge. This was an accident, an incredibly unlucky accident, but it's not the end of the world. Glynda and Raven will calm Pyrrha, then we will all sit down and talk about this, as a family." She looked up from Sun. "Yang, check on Nora will you? I'll call the Belladonnas."

"Right, got it." Yang nodded. "Sun, you hang in there alright?"

"If you say so." Sun sighed.

"None of that quitter talk Wukong." Yang ordered. She gave him a pat on the shoulder before heading out to see Nora.

"Hey Blake." Winter said into her phone. "Can you and Velvet come to Nora's house now? It's urgent." A pause. "Everyone's okay, just get here as soon as you can. We'll explain everything then." Another pause. "See you soon." She slipped her phone into her pocket after ending the call. "Oh
Sun...why did you have to be so virile?"

"You know Winter, I was not expecting you to be like this." Sun laughed.

"What were you expecting?" Winter asked with a smirk.

"Honestly, I thought you might kick my ass." Sun replied. "Stupid, I know, but I figured I'd be lucky if I got away with you screaming at me for an hour. I hope Glynda will be as understanding."

"I know this must be incredibly difficult for all of you, and I can't imagine what you're feeling right now." Winter noted. "Hitting you, yelling at you, being mean in general, it's just going to do more harm than good. Being stern might be appropriate sometimes, but when you're hurting like this, you need kindness...even if you have been a bit of an idiot."

"Being a bit of an idiot is sort of my schtick." Sun smiled.

Winter pulled him into a somewhat awkward hug. "And we love you for it."

"Hey sis, how ya' holdin' up?" Yang asked.

"A little shaky." Nora admitted. "Is Sun okay?"

"Hanging by a thread, but he'll be fine." Yang replied. "What's going through your head?"

"I love 'em, a-and I think if they can calm down and think about things, we can all do this." Nora answered.

"You're up for having two kids?" Yang pressed.

"I'd love to!" Nora cheered. "I'd love Pyrrha's child like they were my own, b-but it's up to Pyrrha. I know she's scared, and I know she might...she...might not go through with it, but I'll love her no matter what Yang. I'll love her with all my heart."

"I know you will." Yang smiled. "You're awesome like that."

Nora took a shaky breath before returning the smile. "But hey, we did it." She forced a laugh. "I'm preggers."

"Yeah you are, you really are." Yang laughed. "You're gonna' have a baby, and I'm gonna' be the best aunt in the world."

"Aunts are great and all, but I think Blakey and Velvs have that covered." Nora said. "How about Godmother?"

"God yes!" Yang exclaimed. "I'd love to!"

"This is happening!" Nora shouted.
"Hell yeah it is!" Yang cheered.

Nora started jumping up and down on the spot, the excitement she had suppressed for Sun and Pyrrha's sakes now unleashed. "I'm gonna' be a mama!" She giggled. "I'm gonna' be the best mama in the world!" She stopped jumping. "Hey Rave..."

Yang turned around to see Raven slowly approaching, a small smile on her face, arms wrapped around herself. "Heya Nora...congrats," Raven said.

Nora ran up and hugged Raven. "Is Pyrrha okay?" She asked.

"I...I think she will be," Raven answered. "This is just...it's gonna' be hard for her to get used to. C-can I talk to Yang for a bit? You should go talk to Glynda."

"Sure, thanks for the help." Nora nodded. "I love you."

Nora kissed Raven on the cheek before dashing into the house. Raven made her way to the gazebo, sitting on the steps with her head bowed. Yang sat down beside her and laid an arm around her shoulders. "She's not okay, is she?" Yang sighed.

"It's happening all over again Yang," Raven sobbed. "I...I tried to warn her...didn't want to sugar coat it...I...I told her..." Her sobs overcame her ability to speak and Yang pulled her into a more comfortable embrace. "I told her not to make a mistake...not to make my mistake. I love you Yang...God I love you...I don't care how it happened and how much it hurt, you're still the best thing that ever happened to me...but I needed to be sure. I need her to be ready. I...I'm sorry."

"It's okay, I understand." Yang soothed.

"You shouldn't have to," Raven groaned.

"I know, but that doesn't change the truth of it," Yang countered. "I love you mom, you're trying your best, you don't have to apologize anymore." Raven squeezed Yang before pulling away with a sigh, sniffing and wiping her eyes. "Well, silver lining, I doubt anything could surprise us after this."

"What if Sun got Winter pregnant?" Raven countered.

"Pfft, as if." Yang laughed. "Winter's ovaries would chew up his sperm and spit them back out."

Raven snorted and the pair shared a laugh both desperately needed.

--

Nora walked into the house to find Glynda waiting for her. They headed into the spare bedroom for privacy and Glynda took a seat on the bed, patting the space beside her to encourage Nora to sit as well. She did so, rocking back and forth with nervous energy. "How do you feel about this?" Glynda asked.

"I'm okay with it." Nora replied. "I love Pyrrha, I love Sun, we can make the best of this."

"And...what if Pyrrha decides otherwise?" Glynda pressed.

Nora flinched slightly but noticeably, then took a deep breath. "Then I'll be okay with that." Nora answered, her voice shaky. "I-it's her decision. I just...if that happens...I don't know if things will go back to normal. I don't know if they can. I don't want to lose what we have. It's beautiful, it's fun, and if Sun and Pyrrha can't get past it I don't know what I would do." Nora looked distraught, her words straining with emotion. She was clearly on the verge of breaking down, so Glynda pulled her...
into her arms, allowing Nora to latch onto her. "I just want us to be happy."

"Regardless of what happens, I will make sure of that." Glynda declared. "You're my family, and I love you. Your happiness is paramount." Nora fell silent for a time, and Glynda ran her fingers through Nora's hair soothingly.

"Is this what having a mom feels like?" Nora finally asked.

"I sure hope so." Glynda laughed. "I wouldn't be doing a good job otherwise."

"You're always doing a good job." Nora declared.

Glynda smiled. "Thank you Nora."

Blake pounded on the steering wheel, Velvet shuddering with each hit. "How the hell is there so much traffic this late?!" Blake demanded.

"You know there's construction…" Velvet sighed. "Now of all times…I want to be there with them so bad."

"Come on Velvs, Winter said everyone's okay." Blake assured her. "Don't worry so much."

"If everyone was okay it wouldn't be urgent." Velvet countered. "Winter probably just didn't want us to worry."

"Velvs…" Blake started.

"What if someone's sick, or injured?" Velvet suggested. "What if it's worse?" By now she was shaking. "I...I don't know what if would do if…"

"If it was that bad Winter wouldn't have been so calm." Blake encouraged.

"What if someone's missing?" Velvet continued. "What if Nora killed a burglar?!"

"I married this…" Blake groaned.

Velvet gasped. "What if Nora's infertile?"

There was a brief silence. "Velvs, you're overthinking things." Blake declared. "This is probably just something small that's been blown out of proportion. There's no sense worrying when we don't know anything, so slow down, take a breather, and try to relax. We'll be there soon."
Left alone, Pyrrha sat on the bed for a while longer. When she finally did get up she walked over to the full-body mirror off to the side of the room. She looked herself up and down. A trainwreck. Her hair was chaotic, her face stained with tears, her attire entirely unacceptable for guests to see. She had managed to calm down a little, and was starting to return to her senses. She slipped on some simple but presentable clothes and combed her hair. Her tear stained face would have to wait until she had access to a sink, but it was a start. She returned to the mirror. Despite the clear evidence of her crying and the look of desperation still etched on her face, her appearance remained mostly unchanged. And yet so much had changed.

Pyrrha exited the bedroom and made her way to the lounge. She had heard the jumbled voices of overlapping conversations, but when she arrived they stopped. All eyes turned to her as she scanned the assembled crowd: Yang leaning against the couch, Winter seated in a chair, Blake and Velvet on the loveseat, Raven and Glynda standing next to one another, Nora and Sun on the couch. They all looked relieved, perhaps because they saw her change in attire to be a sign of improvement. Upon seeing her, Nora and Sun slid away from one another to make room for Pyrrha to sit between them, but she had another idea.

Pyrrha walked up to Sun, bending down to wrap him in an embrace. "I'm sorry I hit you." She apologized. "I'm sorry I yelled. This isn't your fault, and you certainly didn't deserve that."

"I'm sorry too." Sun said, returning the hug. "I really got us into a mess Pyr."

Pyrrha took a deep breath and sat between Sun and Nora. "It's tough for all of us." She sighed. "I should be better than this, but I have my moments, like everyone does. It's rare that something so big happens so suddenly, and I was overwhelmed. I apologize for the panic, and I am truly grateful for the support you all have given me."

"We're a family Pyrrha." Glynda declared. "It's our job to support one another. You're going to get through this, and we'll all be there to help."

"Thank you." Pyrrha smiled. "Now I just think I need some time to properly digest the situation, consider my options, and make the right decisions." She paused. "Glynda, can you cover my appointments, just until I'm ready? I don't think I'll be much help to anyone like this."

"Of course." Glynda replied. "Take as much time off as you need."

"I think...I think I'll be alright now." Pyrrha declared. "I've taken more than enough of your time. You can all get back to your lives now."

"Are you kidding?" Yang laughed. "We're not going anywhere."

"Slumber party?" Blake suggested.

"I feel severely outnumbered." Sun complained.

Nora reached around Pyrrha to slap Sun on the back. "You love it."
Raven had never been big on video games. The only reason she even had a console was because she thought playing with Yang would be a good way to bond. That did not quite work out as Yang was usually frustrated with Raven's general lack of skill, or trash talked Raven mercilessly. In the end the device sat mostly dormant, gathering dust below the television. But today Raven sat on the couch, controller in hand, playing a game all by herself. The blocky crafting game had been a recommendation from Winter, and Raven was having an alright time as she tried to work out all the mechanics.

If the game helped Winter unwind or get her mind off painful topics, it could work for Raven. So far her efforts had been futile. Just the knowledge that she was playing to try to forget was enough to bring the situation to the forefront of her mind. Pyrrha was going through hell, a hell Raven knew all too well, and having to see it happen again was painful to say the least. Raven deeply cared for Pyrrha, in addition to having great respect for her, and the idea that she might be following in Raven's footsteps filled her with dread.

Raven had once thought the feelings dead and buried. She certainly tried her best to erase them. Running away did not work, drinking did not work, her failed marriages did not work, sleeping around did not work. In the end it had been her reconciliation with Yang that had put most of the painful thoughts to rest, and Glynda's love had taken care of the rest. Now those memories were back with a vengeance. The game was not working. Raven paused the game and put the controller on the coffee table with a sigh.

A knock on the door made Raven jump. She laughed at her own skittishness and got up. Glynda was not scheduled to get home for a few hours yet, and she had a key besides, so Raven figured it was one of two options. Either it was a package being delivered or the demons of Raven's past come to devour her soul. Raven opened the door to find Pyrrha standing there with two bags in one hand and a tray with two coffee cups in the other. "Demons it is..." Raven grumbled under her breath. "Hey Pyrrha."

"Hello Raven, is this a bad time?" Pyrrha asked.

Raven laughed and stepped forward, taking the coffee from Pyrrha and wrapping her free arm around her. "It's never a bad time for you Pyr." She declared. "Come on in."

Pyrrha followed Raven in and the pair sat on the couch. Pyrrha opened the bags to reveal that one was filled with cinnamon donuts and the other glazed. She looked up at the television. "Oh, you play too?" She asked.

"Eh...not really." Raven shrugged. "Win said it helped her wind down...when Yang isn't distracting her by building dicks that is."

"So that's where Nora gets it!" Pyrrha exclaimed. "It glows in the dark!"

"They make condoms like that." Raven laughed.

"I know, we bought some..." Pyrrha sighed. "We bought a lot of them..."

As Pyrrha trailed off, Raven took her hand, squeezing it reassuringly. Pyrrha smiled, leaning against Raven. "How are you holdin' up kiddo?" Raven asked.

"Much better than I was." Pyrrha replied. "Just have a lot to think about. Thank you again Raven, I
know this is a difficult situation for you as well, and I appreciate your willingness to help. I wouldn't have blamed you for distancing yourself."

"I...I wanted to, mostly." Raven admitted. "Glynda basically dragged me to your house the other night. I knew what I might be walking into. I'm just glad you handled it better than I did."

"Yes, I can't see myself knocking out Sun and trashing half the house, let alone topping it." Pyrrha laughed. "My upper body strength sucks."

"Strength doesn't really matter." Raven noted. "Learn how to throw a punch and a stick figure can knock someone out. I'll teach you sometime."

"I'd appreciate it." Pyrrha smiled. "Can I ask you a few things? They're things we haven't talked about before, and not really personal..."

"You can ask me anything Pyrrha." Raven declared.

"I know." Pyrrha nodded. "I just want to know what to expect...while expecting?"

"Oh boy." Raven laughed. "Well, enjoy those donuts, because there's a chance you won't be able to stomach them anymore."

"Really?" Pyrrha asked. "Why?"

"No idea." Raven shrugged. "For some reason random smells start to repulse you. Like for me, I love Mistralian, did back then too, but shortly after I fell pregnant, just a whiff would have me heaving...ugh."

"I really hope I can still stand pancakes." Pyrrha sighed.

"They your favorite?" Raven asked.

"Nora's." Pyrrha replied. "She'll be devastated if I can't cook them anymore."

"Fingers crossed." Raven said. "Then there's morning sickness. Apparently not everyone suffers from it, but I call bullshit on that. Never met a mother who didn't. That sucks, and your boobs will get bigger and more sensitive, and ache for no reason. Ankles too. And that's all without mentioning your belly, which varies from person to person. Some women get huge, some women get a tiny little bump. I was in a lucky, manageable middle, but it still wreaked havoc on my back."

"Oh...well..." Pyrrha groaned.

"One upside though." Raven noted.

"Hmm?" Pyrrha asked.

"Breast milk." Raven smirked.

"Oh...oh!" Pyrrha gasped.

"Oh yea, we had some fun times with that..." Raven reminisced. "Ah...good times."

They were silent for a while as they ate their donuts and drank their coffee. "I know which way I'm leaning." Pyrrha finally spoke up. "I just need some more time to set it in stone."

"Take your time Pyrrha." Raven advised. "You've got about three or so months I think."
"Yeah...thank you Raven." Pyrrha said. "I needed this."

"I'm a mom, a shitty one in recovery, but still a mom." Raven laughed. "I gotta' try."

"You're doing well." Pyrrha encouraged. "You've come so far. It's hard to believe how far the tables have turned, huh?"

"This isn't exactly why I would have envisioned turning said tables." Raven shook her head.

"Life makes fools of us all it seems." Pyrrha laughed.

"Life's a cunt." Raven joked.

Pyrrha smiled and nodded. "Preach."

--

Pyrrha found herself laying down to think with increasing frequency. The bed, the couch, the gazebo, anywhere peaceful and comforting. Sometimes Nora would join her, but more often than not she was alone. She would lie there and absentmindedly put a hand on her stomach, sometimes catching herself stroking it as she let her mind wander, going over her thoughts, her feelings, her wants and desires. A few weeks had passed since the positive test, a little less since her talk with Raven. She had spent most of the time in relative seclusion - apart from Sun and Nora, who had been surprisingly scarce despite spending every day near her.

Nora did not attempt to initiate sex, and limited her usual intimacy to gentle hugs and quick kisses that deepened only if Pyrrha pushed. Sun was even more hesitant. He clearly still felt guilty, and Pyrrha made sure to hold him longer than usual, whoever initiated the embrace. Pyrrha was grateful for them giving her the space she needed. Normally she was okay with Nora setting the pace, like riding a rollercoaster with varying speed. It kept things fresh and exciting, but now Pyrrha needed things to slow down for a while. She ensured they did not neglect their own needs however. Nora's libido was strong and their recent sex life had been healthy to say the least. Pyrrha made it clear that just because she was abstaining for the time being, they should not feel obligated to join her. Though hesitant to agree, Sun and Nora were less antsy afterward, and more clingy in bed, which was fine with Pyrrha. She had always felt hugs were underrated.

Pyrrha considered the paths ahead of her. One path was painful from the get-go. Abortion. It was a word that caused her to flinch just thinking about it. She had never given much thought to the subject in the past. She did not oppose the idea. Accidental pregnancies happened often, and the world did not need unwanted children. Children did not deserve to be unwanted, something Pyrrha knew better than most.

Nora tried not to show it, but the idea clearly repulsed her. She loved children, she loved life, she loved Sun and she loved Pyrrha. This child was part of both Sun and Pyrrha, so Nora loved them unconditionally, even barely formed in the womb. Nora would never admit this of course. She would not try to influence Pyrrha one way or the other. It was in Nora's nature not to confront Pyrrha with something serious like this, even if she had the right to, as if Pyrrha would fade away at the first sign of resistance. It was an irrational fear born of loss, a fear that she might never truly overcome. Nora would accept Pyrrha's decision either way, even if she had to swallow every negative feeling and thought for the rest of her life. Nora was utterly, unquestionably devoted to Pyrrha, and her choice would not change that.

Sun was less secure in his feeling. He took full blame for the situation, no matter how much Nora and Pyrrha assured him the mistake was mutual. His guilt, combined with the fear he had originally
waved away, fear of being incapable, inadequate and unfit, was only magnified by the love he felt for both women and the possibility of a second child. Sun was not so emotionally attached to the idea of a second child as Nora, and his dilemma stemmed from how his perceived mistake would change their relationship. He loved Nora, his best friend for years, turned lover. He loved Pyrrha, the woman who trusted him to care for Nora when she could not, who had opened her heart...among other things...to him, despite the risks involved. In his mind he had broken the trust they had built, and was absolutely terrified that his mistake would destroy everything they had. So long as Pyrrha was happy, so long as Nora was happy, so long as their relationship remained strong, Sun would accept whatever choice Pyrrha made.

Pyrrha knew the obvious path to take. The other one. The scary one. The one that could be amazing, but just as easily be a disaster. Pyrrha knew that sadness would result from aborting, but she did not know if it would result from keeping the child. Sun would make a good father, she had faith in that. Nora would make a great mother, that was without question. But would Pyrrha make a good mother? Like it or not she was matriarch of the family. Nora was a great woman, the love of her life, but she was incapable of functioning without relying on others for help. Sun was a good man, but lacked the confidence and capability to take the reins. No, this family was Pyrrha's, and the weight of that responsibility was nearly crushing.

Pyrrha was used to being in a position of power. A therapist's job was to help people, to analyze and break them down to the roots of their issues, to strip away all that they were until only the worst aspects of them remained, then chip away piece by painful piece, until they could safely put themselves back together, leaving them healthier, whole. She knew how to do that. She was confident in her abilities. She had seen first hand, in Raven and Nora, in Garland, Holly, Chrys, Steel, Oliver and many others she had seen come and go. But all of those people, they were adults, grown, intelligent, functioning human beings. They knew her and recognized her as a source of help healing and knowledge. Would it work with a child?

A child knew nothing. A child was irrational, unintelligent and sociopathic. Pyrrha did not know how to handle the idea of helping a human, a child, that could not heed her advice, that might hate her, reject her, disrespect her utterly and leave her despondent. A child she might mistreat, force unwanted ideals upon, misunderstand and mishandle. A child she might fail to raise properly. She could be the reason that child ended up in therapy, the problem rather than the solution. Like her parents.

But Pyrrha had made a promise to herself, years ago, to stop allowing her parents'...her birth parents'...mistakes to hold her back. Glynda, a greater mother than she had ever hoped for, had helped her so much since they had met. Because of Glynda, the scars of her childhood no longer held her back. Step by step she moved forward, inch by inch the scars faded, she found purpose, she found love, and now...now she would find life.

Pyrrha had made her decision. She was having this child. She would not make mistakes that had once caused her so much suffering. Pyrrha was stronger than that, smarter, and - though absolutely terrified of the future - willing to move forward. Yes, it started as an accident, but sometimes the most wonderful things happen by accident. What if Pyrrha had not met Glynda? It had been pure chance, and had altered her entire existence for the better. Perhaps it was time, once again, to let the chips fall where they may. Pyrrha rubbed her stomach, this time on purpose, before getting up and heading to the bedroom. She had to set up a few things first.

--

Sun and Nora returned home from a dinner with Yang. It had been a usually lively affair, with puns and innuendo flying. Now the pair found the house seemingly empty. They kicked off their shoes
and Nora tossed her purse on a table near the door. "Pyrrha, we're home!" Sun announced.

"In the bedroom!" Pyrrha called.

Nora and Sun made their way to the bedroom, stopping in their tracks as they got a glimpse through the open door. Pyrrha sat on the bed in a skimpy robe, a gentle smile on her face. The room itself was lit by candles, with rose petals scattered on the floor and crimson silk sheets lined the bed. "Oh mama." Nora gasped.

"Welcome home." Pyrrha said, her voice still a tad shaky. "I've...I've made my decision." Nora climbed onto the bed, sliding behind Pyrrha and embracing her. Sun knelt in front, combining with Nora to sandwich Pyrrha in a hug. "I love you, both of you. What we have together is beautiful. It makes me happy, and I want to cherish it for the rest of our lives, every part of it, our children included."

"You're really ready?" Nora asked. Pyrrha nodded and turned to kiss her, before turning back to kiss Sun as well.

"We're really gonna' do this?" Sun asked.

"I'm going to have this baby." Pyrrha declared. "We're both having babies. I-it's going to be tough, and I won't always handle everything well, but I know that with both of you at my side, I can do this. We can do this. I-if you're willing."

Sun pulled Pyrrha into another kiss. "Of course I'm willing." He smiled. "I love you."

"One baby was going to be difficult enough, let alone two, and then there's the pregnancy beforehand." Pyrrha warned. "Things are going to get rough. Are you sure you want this?"

"There isn't a doubt in my mind." Sun declared. He smirked. "I just hope I survive the madness. I want to brag about my kids, and my beautiful...wives?"

"Do they even do poly marriages?" Nora asked.

"For that matter, aren't we supposed to get married before having children?" Pyrrha added.

"We're kinda' breaking all the rules here." Sun laughed.

"Eh, fuck 'em!" Nora cheered.

"Speaking of which…" Pyrrha started.

"Celebratory sex?" Nora suggested.

Pyrrha untied her robe, letting it fall away to reveal she was wearing nothing beneath. "We do have some catching up to do…"
It was Saturday morning. Sun was out teaching a class and Nora was doing a photoshoot. Pyrrha had not been feeling particularly well, in more ways than one, so she had decided to stay home. Nora had been polite enough to give Glynda a call, telling her about Pyrrha's difficulties and that she would be alone for the day, and Glynda decided to keep Pyrrha company. They sat on the couch, watching television, talking about everything and nothing. So far the trouble Pyrrha had been having had not come up.

Pyrrha flinched. "G-Glynda...I think I felt a kick!" She gasped.

"The child won't start kicking for another three months Pyrrha." Glynda said. "It's barely a baseball."

"Then could something be wrong?" Pyrrha asked, her voice shaking. "I shouldn't feel anything yet, but I felt something bump. I'm sure I did." Pyrrha's stomach growled loudly and her eyes went wide. "OhmyGodwhatthappened?!"

"You're stomach growled Pyrrha." Glynda attempted to calm her. "You're hungry. What did you have for breakfast?"

"Breakfast..." Pyrrha trailed off.

"Pyrrha..." Glynda sighed and shook her head.

"I'm sorry!" Pyrrha exclaimed. "Nora and Sun let me sleep in and it slipped my mind."

"Then I'll make you a sandwich." Glynda offered.

"I-I can do it..." Pyrrha started to get up.

"Sit!" Glynda commanded, putting an arm in front of Pyrrha. "Stay!"

"Yes ma'am." Pyrrha said, sinking back into her seat.

Glynda made her way to the kitchen and opened up the pantry. "I swear, it's finals all over again." She laughed. She pulled out a loaf of bread before heading to the refrigerator.

"At least my fears were rational then." Pyrrha sighed.

"You were never going to fail Pyrrha." Glynda countered. "You were too intelligent and too driven to achieve anything less than a passing mark. I was and still am proud of you. You've come so far. What would you like?"

"Cheese and ham please." Pyrrha replied. "Making you proud has always brought me joy. You were my first role model, my first idol. You pushed me when I needed it, praised me when I earned it, and loved me. You loved me Glynda. No one had given me that love before you. I know I sound like a broken record, but I can never thank you enough for all you've done for me. I would be nothing without you."
Glynda finished the sandwiches and returned, sitting beside her and setting the plate on the coffee table. "You are my reason for living Pyrrha." Glynda declared. "Being my best for you is what kept me going during those early times, when my mind would find itself wandering to darker places. I could feel myself slipping, losing heart and losing hope. Then I would find you asleep at your desk, or fretting about a test, or I would just find myself thinking about you, how much you needed me, how much I wanted to help you, how much we meant to each other. Were it not for you Pyrrha, I may not be here at all. You may not be my daughter, but you are my girl, and I'm proud of everything you've done, especially this." She laid a hand on Pyrrha's, which had unconsciously migrated to her belly. "You will be a wonderful mother Pyrrha. I'm sure of it."

"I have a wonderful example to follow." Pyrrha smiled.

Glynda smiled back and kissed Pyrrha on the forehead. "Mother says it's time for lunch." Glynda laughed.

"Thank you." Pyrrha nodded, picking up a sandwich. "They look delicious. I just hope I can keep them down."

Glynda reached down past the side of the couch, grabbing an empty garbage can. "The bucket's ready, just in case."

As the days turned to weeks, Pyrrha's sanity began to slip. It seemed the hormones, or the stress, or some combination of the two, were messing with her brain. She was anxious, prone to sudden mood swings, and had trouble concentrating. The others found it disconcerting. She had always been the put together one, and now she appeared to be coming apart at the seams. She noticed too, but it only made her worry more. Nora underwent changes as well, but they were very different. Where Pyrrha's sanity was slipping, Nora's increased. She was abnormally level-headed, surprisingly patient and even quiet. The others thought of it as a nice change, but Nora found it unsettling. She just did not feel like herself.

"How's it going?" Yang asked.

"Oh, you know, slowly losing my sanity." Pyrrha forced a laugh. "Nothing I haven't dealt with before. Just not used to it being me and not a patient."

"I think you're overreacting." Winter warned. "It only looks like you're losing it because Nora's so...lucid. I've never seen her so...normal."

"Yeah, she's the one taking care of me more often than not." Pyrrha shook her head. "It's strange to be on the other side. And she hates it. I guess it was all sunshine and rainbows in her head before, and now she's got a hard dose of reality."

"How's Sun handling everything?" Yang asked.

"Well, no signs of running." Pyrrha laughed. "He doesn't seem very different to me. Maybe a little
more responsible."

"See, it's not too bad." Winter encouraged. "You get a little more loopy, them less. It all balances."

"True." Pyrrha nodded. "But I'm a little worried about what will happen when Nora and I are too pregnant for sex. Their libidos are off the charts."

"If the darker corners of the internet have taught me anything, it's that you're never too pregnant for sex." Yang joked. "And that and there are some things that just can't be unseen."

"I guess you're right but…" Pyrrha started. Suddenly there was a loud pop, and the sound of shattering glass.

"What the…" Winter gasped, jumping up from her seat.

"Shit that was loud!" Yang exclaimed.

Blake burst into the break room, breathing heavily. "What happened?" Winter asked.

"One of the lights exploded." Blake replied. "It's fine though. No one's hurt or anything. Just a little clean-up ahead of us."

"Oh, well that's a relief." Yang sighed. "It sounded like we were under attack."

"You should have seen the flash and the sparks." Blake said. "Hey Pyrrha...you okay?"

Pyrrha was hunched over in her chair, clutching her chest and hyperventilating. "I...I...can't…" She struggled.

"Pyrrha?!" Winter gasped, rushing to her side. "What's wrong?"

"Can't...breathe…" Pyrrha said. "Chest...hurts...something...wrong…"


"I...can't…" Pyrrha groaned. "Head…"

"Pyrrha, can we help?" Yang asked desperately.

"Can't…" Pyrrha trailed off. She slumped in her chair, sliding toward the floor. Yang and Winter caught her under the arms.

"She's unconscious!" Winter shouted. "Blake, call an ambulance!"

--

Pyrrha opened her eyes and was blinded by white light. She heard beeping, along with some jumbled voices. Her eyes quickly adjusted, and she could see that she was in a hospital bed, surrounded by her friends. She vaguely remembered being unable to breathe, her chest tight, her consciousness slipping away. Nora was just beside her. Pyrrha reached out, grabbing Nora by the arm. Nora jumped and spun to face Pyrrha. "Oh!" Nora gasped. "Pyrrha…"

"Nora, is the baby okay?" Pyrrha asked desperately.

"Yeah, the baby's fine." Nora replied. "You had us all really worried though."
"Are you sure?" Pyrrha pressed.

"The doctors ran a lot of tests and they said the baby is fine." Sun assured her. "They want to do a few more scans to be sure, but you shouldn't worry."

"Oh, that's good." Pyrrha breathed a sigh of relief. "What...what happened?"

"You passed out in the break room." Yang replied.

"No, why did I pass out?" Pyrrha asked.

"The doctors think you had a panic attack." Winter explained.

"A panic attack?" Pyrrha groaned. "What's wrong with me?"

"There's nothing wrong with you." Nora encouraged.

"But there is!" Pyrrha protested. "Nothing like this has ever happened to me! Being anxious and moody was bad enough, but this..." The monitors keeping track of Pyrrha's vitals began beeping louder and faster.

"Pyrrha, you need to stay calm." Winter advised. "For the baby."

It did not work. "How am I supposed to stay calm?" Pyrrha asked, tears streaming down her face. "I'm losing my mind!"

"You're not losing your mind." Nora declared. "Trust me, I know what it's like. The hormones are just making you a little silly. You're still you, the way I'm still me, even if I'm not bouncing off the walls. Everything's going to be fine. You just need to relax."

"I...but...okay..." Pyrrha sighed. The beeps began to subside almost immediately. "You're right. If I freak out it'll only make things worse. I'm not losing it. I'm just stressed. That's all. I'll be fine."

"That's the spirit." Yang said.

Glynda burst into the room, followed closely by Raven. "Is everything alright?" She asked. "Is the baby okay? Is Pyrrha?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine." Pyrrha answered.

"Oh, Pyrrha." Glynda said. She rushed to Pyrrha and wrapped her in a tight embrace. "I was so worried when I heard."

"I'm fine, the baby's fine, everything's fine." Pyrrha assured her. "I just...I had a panic attack and passed out."

"A panic attack?" Glynda gasped.

"Yeah, I know." Pyrrha groaned. "What's wrong with me?"

"There's nothing wrong with you." Glynda encouraged. "We all have our moments. Even I ended up in the hospital after a panic attack once."

"Really?" Pyrrha asked.

"Really." Glynda confirmed. "The important thing is you're okay. If you want we can work on some
calming techniques."

"I already know them." Pyrrha noted. "I just...I never expected I'd be the one who needed them."

"We all need help sometimes." Glynda declared.

Pyrrha craned her neck to look past Glynda. "Raven, are you okay?" Pyrrha asked.

Raven was white as a sheet, tears in her eyes. "I...I...I was just so scared." She sobbed.

"I'm so sorry, come here." Pyrrha reached out to her. Raven walked over and bent down into the embrace. Glynda latched on as well. In seconds Nora, Yang, Sun, Winter, Blake and Velvet were all in on the hug as well. "I like this. This is nice."

"It would be even nicer if we weren't in the hospital." Raven said with an uneasy laugh.

Yang pulled away from the others with a smirk on her face. "Do ya' think they'll let us order pizza here?"

--

Blake and Velvet were not rushing things with adopting a child. They were exploring many options, having visited a few orphanages, talked with Vale's adoption organization, and even looked into adopting a foreign child. They had made one decision, they were not going to adopt blindly. They were going to meet a child in person, to make a connection before pulling the trigger. The pair scheduled another orphanage visit, this one on the outskirts of Vale City. Then, at the last second, a photo shoot in Vacuo popped up. Winter would be the model and needed Velvet to go along.

Rather than cancel the visit, Blake decided to go ahead and visit the orphanage without Velvet. Her fear of flying would keep her at home anyway. But she did not want to go alone. Luckily Pyrrha's increasingly loose grip on sanity meant Winter had ordered everyone else to stay home to be there, just in case. Blake asked Yang to go with her, and - loving kids - Yang readily agreed. Though Yang did not have the solid plans Blake and Velvet did, she too hoped to one day adopt, to expand her family with Winter.

Blake picked Yang up Saturday morning and they headed for the orphanage. "Why are you wearing so much?" Blake asked. "It's the middle of summer?"

Yang was indeed wearing more than usual. Rather than her usual tank top and short shorts, she wore capri pants and a jacket over her top. Blake had dressed up a bit, hoping to make a good impression, but Yang had no such obligations. "What, you want me to give the kiddies a show?" Yang joked. Blake huffed. "Ah, I figured I'd wear something that covered my tattoos. Wouldn't want to scare the kids, ya' know?"

"Why the pants?" Blake pressed.

"A jacket and short shorts?" Yang laughed. "Don't you think that would look a little weird?"

Blake thought for a moment. "Good point." Blake nodded. "Well, I'm glad you dressed up, good first impressions and all that." She pulled the car to a halt in front of a building that looked more like a warehouse than a home for children. The only indication that it was an orphanage was a play set occupying a small patch of grass on the side. "Well, this is it."

"Looks depressing." Yang observed as they got out of the car and started for the building.
Most orphanages are." Blake sighed. "At least the kids don't have to be lonely."

"Welcome, can I help you?" An olive-skinned blonde said as the pair entered.

"I'm Blake Belladonna, I scheduled a visit." Blake replied.

"Oh, hello, I'm Arslan." The woman said. "I oversee the facility. You must be Velvet." She gestured toward Yang.

"Nope." Yang laughed. "Velvs couldn't make it. I'm just here for moral support."

"Yes, something came up at work so Velvet can't be here." Blake explained. "This is my friend Yang."

"Oh, well thank you both for coming," Arslan smiled. "The children are excited to have new guests. Come with me." Arslan led Blake and Yang to a large room just beyond the lobby. Judging by the toys scattered about the floor, it was a play room. "Children, our guests have arrived!" Arslan announced.

A dozen children raced over, standing before Blake and Yang. "Welcome!" They cheered, their faces beaming with smiles. To Yang it seemed a bit rehearsed, but it still gave her a warm, fuzzy feeling.

"Hi, I'm Blake." She said.

"And I'm Yang." She said. "But she's the one you want." Yang laughed.

"Do you think I could have some one-on-one time with each of them?" Blake asked.

"Of course." Arslan replied. "We have a room prepared for just that." Arslan directed Blake to the room. "Are you coming as well Yang?"

"That's okay." Yang shook her head. "I think I'll just hang out here." She walked over to a table covered with plastic building blocks. "I'll keep the kids company."

"Very good." Arslan smiled. "Asher, you're up first." A small boy with silver hair rushed off into the room with Blake.

Yang sat in one of the child-sized plastic chairs and started snapping blocks together. "Come on, build with me." She encouraged, waving the other children over. A few joined her, with others straying to other parts of the room to do their own thing. Slowly most congregated around Yang as they build a haphazard and multi-colored house. After a few minutes Asher returned from his meeting with Blake, and Arslan called in another child. Yang and the other children kept building until the structure was complete, mostly because there were no more blocks to add.

One of the children, a little girl, had been looking at Yang's hand. "What's that on your hand?" The girl asked.

"Oh, this?" Yang said. She turned her arm over to see part of her tattoo protruding from her sleeve. "I have a tattoo. A dragon."

"Can we see it?" One of the other children asked.

"Well, It's a bit scary." Yang warned.

"We won't be scared!" Asher boasted. "Come on! Show us!"
"Well...alright." Yang agreed. She rolled up her sleeve to reveal most of the dragon. She was met with chorus of gasps, "awesome"s, "cool"s, and other compliments. Soon almost all the children were gathered around for a closer look at the colorful artwork.

"Lilly, you're next!" Arslan called. Looking a bit disappointed to have to leave Yang, Lilly headed for the side room.

Yang looked up and noticed something odd. One of the children was not gawking at her tattoo. The little black-haired girl was off on the far side of the room, drawing something with crayons. For some reason Yang was drawn to her. "I'll be right back kids," Yang pulled away. "Why don't you knock that house down and start a new one?" The children eagerly disassembled the block structure as Yang walked over to the lone little girl. "Hey there. Are you alright? Why aren't you playing with everyone else."

The girl shuddered. "I'm...I'm fine." She replied. "I just like to draw." Her squeaky voice sounded familiar to Yang but she could not place it.

"Are you sure?" Yang asked. "We're having a pretty good time. Want to see my tattoos?"

"I saw them from here." The girl answered, still not looking up. "They're pretty."

"Even prettier up close." Yang declared. "Have a look." She held out her arm.

The girl hesitated, but put her crayon down and looked up. First she examined Yang's tattoo, then looked Yang in the face with...shining silver eyes. Yang gasped. Ruby? "Are you okay miss?" The girl asked, giving Yang a confused look.

"Y-yeah." Yang struggled. "I...I just...hold on. I'll be back." Yang headed over to the side room where Blake and Arslan were meeting with another child. She knocked.

"Come in." Arslan called from inside. Yang opened the door and leaned against the doorway. "Is something the matter?"

"Uh...the girl...the one drawing...with the silver eyes..." Yang struggled, her voice shaking. "What's her name?"

"Oh, that's Summer." Arslan replied. "She's a bit shy."

"S-Summer..." Yang gasped.

Yang turned, looking at the tiny girl who had already gone back to coloring. Everything else faded away, Blake and Arslan, the laughing children, the brightly colored toys scattered about. One phrase echoed in Yang's head, words she had not thought about in years. Ruby's last words.

"I hope Summer is okay."
End Season 1.

I apologize for the delay, I'm in charge of updating Ao3 and...well I suck.
Winter posed as Velvet snapped a few pictures. The high desert of Vacuo was not the most comfortable place for a photoshoot, but the desolate landscape was breathtaking. Still, Winter's skimpy bedlah left a lot of exposed skin, skin the desert sun was quickly causing to burn. "Did you get what we need Velvet?" Winter asked.

"I think so." Velvet replied. "We should probably take a few more, just in case."

"I guess that would be wise." Winter sighed. She was desperate to cover her exposed skin, knowing that if she did not soon she would resemble a lobster upon her return to Vale, but getting the right shots was most important. It was the job they had come all this way to do, and Winter was going to get it done, whatever personal discomfort it may entail.

"Ms. Schnee, you have a call." One of the assistants shouted.

Winter hated to risk interrupting a shoot for a phone call, but she needed to be reachable at all times. "Alright, bring it over." Winter groaned. It was just going to waste more time. The assistant handed the phone to Winter while another mercifully brought over an umbrella to shield her from the unyielding glare of the sun. "Blake, I'm in the middle of…"

"I know, and I'm sorry, but this is an emergency." Blake declared, her shaky tone making clear the seriousness of the situation.

"What's happened?" Winter gasped. "Is it Pyrrha?"

"No, Yang…" Blake started. She had difficulty finding the words. "We're visiting that orphanage. She saw a kid that...the kid looks a hell of a lot like her sister and is named Summer."

"Oh God…" Winter shook her head.

"She's going back and forth between staring blankly and sobbing uncontrollably." Blake continued. "Nothing I do or say is helping."

"Shit…Velvet and I will be on the next flight home." Winter declared. She lowered the phone. "Pack up now! We're done!"

"But what about…" Velvet started to protest.

"This is an emergency." Winter cut her off. "We need to get home, now." She pressed the phone back to her ear. "Did you call Glynda?"

"Right before I called you." Blake replied.

"Good, she can handle the situation until I get there." Winter noted. "Just keep her together as best you can. I'll be there as soon as possible."

"We'll do our best." Blake promised, sounding less than encouraging.

Winter hung up and began walking toward the vehicles parked nearby. "Ms. Schnee, shouldn't you change before…" One of the assistants started.
"No time." Winter waved her off. "I'll change later."

It took quite some effort, but Blake, Arslan, and a late arriving Glynda managed to get Yang calmed down. She sat in a chair, staring blankly ahead, occasionally tearing up or mumbling to herself, but the worst outburst were behind her. Arslan had put Blake's meetings with the children on hold, telling them Yang was feeling sick to keep them from getting too concerned. With Yang stabilized, Blake and Glynda took a closer look at Summer. She did indeed resemble the pictures of Ruby that Yang had shown them over the years, but it was not a perfect match. Her eyes were the same color but a different shape, and the little girl's skintone was a bit darker. Yang liked to joke with Winter about how she and Ruby never could tan, going straight from pale to burned.

"Just keep calm Yang." Glynda encouraged. "I know how it looks but it's probably just a coincidence."

"No...there's no way." Yang declared. She reached a shaky hand into her pocket producing her wallet. After digging through it she pulled out a creased and faded photograph, handing it to Glynda. It showed Yang and Ruby, both very young, along with their parents. "Ruby at five."

Blake looked at the picture and did a double-take. She poked her head out the door to look at Summer. "God...she's like a clone..." Blake gasped.

"I just...how?" Yang sighed.

"Is it even possible?" Glynda pressed. "You and your sister were very close. Is it possible that she could have had a child without your knowledge? Was she ever away from you for long enough."

"No she...unless...university." Yang struggled. "She left in mid August for an early orientation thing. Money was tight so she stayed there until May. I guess it would have technically been possible but...why? How?"

"Summer's birthday is the 19th of May." Arslan noted.

"You have her birth certificate, correct?" Glynda asked. "Are her parents listed?"

"John and Jane Doe." Arslan shook her head. "Someone went to quite a bit of trouble to hide her parentage."

"Why would that be hidden?" Blake asked. "Even if she was given up for adoption, why not...I just don't get it."

"How could she not tell me?" Yang wept. "When she came home she seemed depressed...but I figured she was tired or just missed her friends. Later I assumed it was because she was already sick...I never imagined..."

"What do you mean sick?" Arslan asked.

"Ruby passed away, cancer." Blake explained.

"Oh...oh my." Arslan gasped.

"We still shouldn't be jumping to conclusions." Glynda advised. "Ms. Altan, is there any way we could find out who Summer's parents are?"

"Officially, no...but..." Arslan hesitated.
"But what?" Yang pressed, her shock and sadness pushed aside by sudden anger.

"Every so often, I receive anonymous calls from a man." Arslan explained. "He checks up on Summer, sometimes sends her gifts. He's also donated generously to this institution. Hell...without his charity that playroom would be empty. Even the playset outside showed up with a note from him."

"Who is he?" Yang asked.

"Like I said, he contacts me anonymously." Arslan replied.

"Could he be Summer's father?" Blake asked.

"Maybe." Arslan shrugged. "He's never said, and when I asked, he refused to give a clear answer."

"Even if he's not he probably knows something." Glynda suggested. "Is there any way we can get in contact with him."

"Yes, actually." Arslan nodded. "He left a phone number to call if there was ever an emergency involving Summer. I really shouldn't give it to you though."

"But you're going to, right?" Yang leaned forward. "Right?!"

"I am." Arslan sighed. "Just...don't say anything to piss him off. If he stopped donating...it would get rough for the kids."

"I'll make sure she's...diplomatic." Glynda promised.

"I just need to know." Yang declared. "I don't care if he's her father. I just need to know for sure."

"Maybe you should wait for Winter to get here." Blake suggested. "You're still pretty emotional and it'll only be a few hours."

"No, I have to know now." Yang insisted. "I...Ruby...why Ruby?"

He sat at his desk, typing away on his laptop. It was the weekend, and should have been a time of rest, but he allowed himself no such luxury. SDC did not have many competitors, his family's company being one of the few. Only tireless work from managers like himself would keep them from sharing the fate of so many other organizations that had either gone bust or been swallowed whole by the Schnee juggernaut. Some advised him to take a break, to rest more, that his obsessive dedication would kill him, but he paid them no heed.

His cellphone rang. He reached for it but stopped his hand short. The phone's screen remained dark. Wrong phone. The one beside it glowed, "Orphanage" the caller. He was gripped by a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach and a knot in his throat. He always had the phone at his side, he had for years, occasionally updating it to a new model but always keeping the line open and the number the same. It should not have been ringing, for he had given instructions that he should only be called in the event of an emergency.

After hesitating briefly, he picked up the phone, swiped across the screen and held it to his ear. "What's wrong?" He asked.

"Uh...hello...nothing's wrong." A woman's voice replied. It was not the one he was expecting. He had only ever called one person on that line, Arslan Altan, the woman in charge of the orphanage.
"Who are you?" He asked. "Why are you calling this number?"

"I'm...this is Yang Xiao-Long." She answered. "I'm Ru-"

"Ruby's sister." He answered for her.

"That's right." Yang confirmed. "So she is Summer's mother..."

"Yes." He confirmed.

"And you are?" Yang asked.

"Summer's father, Yatsuhashi Daichi." He sighed.

"Um..." Yang started.

"This is a conversation we should have in person." He cut her off. "I owe you that much at least."

"O-okay." Yang agreed. "Where should I meet you?"

"My address is 1127 Cliffside Terrace, just north of the city." Yatsuhashi answered.

"I'll come right now." Yang declared.

"Very well." Yatsuhashi said. Before he could utter another word Yang hung up. He looked at the phone for a few seconds before setting it down on the desk. He heaved a heavy sigh. This was not a situation he had foreseen. Part of him was eager to meet Yang, to finally tell someone the secret he had been hiding for so long, but another part of him wished the past would stay buried forever. Like it or not, he was going to have to face what had happened all those years ago.

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"I'm going now." Yang declared.

"I still think you should wait for Winter." Blake advised.

"No...no, I can't." Yang shook her head. "I have to go."

"I'll go with you if you like." Glynda offered.

"Well, I'll at least need a ride there." Yang sighed. "I could probably use some psyching up on the way too. Sure."

"I'll stay here, finish meeting with the kids." Blake decided. "If we all just left suddenly it might upset them."

"Good idea." Yang agreed. "I hope I...I hope I didn't scare her."

"I'm sure Summer will be fine." Arslan assured her. "I'll set up a meeting between the two of you when you return."

"Yeah...thanks." Yang nodded.

"Yang, are you sure you're ready?" Blake pressed.

Yang remained silent for a moment. "No, but I'm as ready as I'm ever going to be."
Glynda drove Yang to the address and stopped out front. It was a large manor, surrounded by tall hedges, the sort of place Yang imagined Winter had lived in when she was still in Atlas. There were gates for the driveway and the ornate stone footpath to the entrance, but they were open. Yang asked Glynda to wait in the car and got out, walking up the winding path to the steps. She paused at the base, looking up at the house. This man was wealthy, fabulously wealthy, and his daughter - Yang's niece - was in an orphanage. The thought filled Yang with anger but she took a deep breath and suppressed the emotion. The least she could do was give him a chance to explain.

Yang slowly walked up the half dozen steps and pressed the button beside the door. She heard a buzzer ring inside, followed by the approach of heavy footfalls. The door was opened by a hulking man with short black hair and olive skin. He was a full head taller than Yang and looked strong enough to lift a refrigerator. One look at his face told Yang that he was Summer's father, both sharing some facial features, most notably eye shape. Yang was unsure of what to say, of what to do, but he made the first move.

"Yang Xiao-Long?" He asked.

Yang nodded. "Yatsuhashi Daichi?" She asked.

He nodded. "Please, come in." Yatsuhashi waved, stepping back from the door. He pointed to a room just off the grand main hall with its richly decorated twin staircase. "Make yourself comfortable." Yang was not sure she could do that given the circumstances. "Would you like anything? Coffee? Tea?"

"Given how today's gone so far, I'd say whiskey, but I'd rather just talk to you." Yang replied.

Yatsuhashi nodded and walked into the side room with her. It was a cozy lounge with a number of chairs and sofas clustered around a beautiful stone fireplace. "Please, sit." He insisted. Yang chose a chair and sat down, Yatsuhashi sitting across from her. "I had hoped to meet you one day. Ruby spoke fondly of you, loving, caring, protective, but temperamental. I expected to be struck upon meeting."

"Maybe I've mellowed over the years." Yang forced a laugh. "Or maybe today just has me worn out."

"It can't have been easy." Yatsuhashi sighed. "How is Ruby?"

"She's...she passed away." Yang sighed, casting her gaze downward. Yatsuhashi flinched, then stared at her in stunned silence. "She uh...she was diagnosed with a rare cancer when she got home from college. She...she lived a little more than a year after that. She never told me..."

"I'm...my God." Yatsuhashi gasped. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be." Yang waved him off. "There's nothing you could have done. All the money in the world wouldn't have saved her."

"I wish I'd been there for her." Yatsuhashi declared.

"Why didn't you ever contact her?" Yang asked.

"After everything that happened..." Yatsuhashi started before pausing. "When she left, she said she needed some space, some time to think about everything. She'd just given up our child. I can't imagine how agonizing it must have been for her. When she never contacted me, I just assumed she'd decided to make a clean break, to shield herself from the pain. When she didn't return to the university in the fall, I took it as confirmation."
"How did it happen?" Yang asked. "How did...Summer happen?"

"Ruby and I met on the first day of orientation." Yatsuhashi answered. "She was being picked on. She seemed a bit quirky, and combined with her accent I guess that made her a target."

"Her accent?" Yang inquired.

"Yes, she had a very distinct Patch accent." Yatsuhashi explained. "She was being teased for being a hick, among other things. I defended her. For the rest of the day she refused to leave my side. We got to talking and she told me she was lonely. She'd never really been away from home before, and even though it had only been a few days she already missed you terribly. That night she stayed in my dorm room, slept in my bed. We talked and I held her. The next night...well...it was the first time for both of us, and we weren't thinking. I suppose I don't have to go any further."

"So...how did someone with all this end up with a daughter in an orphanage?" Yang pressed, making a sweeping gesture.

"I must seem a monster." Yatsuhashi sighed. "Maybe I am. When I found out Ruby was pregnant, I panicked. You see, my family is very wealthy, but they're very strict. If they found out I fathered an illegitimate child, they would have cut me off. At that time I had nothing, just the promise of a share of the family fortune that I would not receive until I graduated. I told Ruby all this. I knew she was poor, and she confirmed that you were already struggling just to put food on the table. There was no way you could afford a child too. If I was cut off, you would have had to support all of us. She didn't have the heart to abort so..."

"So, what, you made her give the kid up?" Yang demanded through gritted teeth.

"No, God no." Yatsuhashi shook his head. "For her...for her I would have given up everything. I loved her...I still do. It was her choice. She didn't want to ruin my life or yours. If she gave up the child for adoption, we could all move on, and hopefully Summer would end up in a good home and have the sort of childhood we knew we wouldn't be able to provide."

"But...but...why didn't she tell me?" Yang asked.

"She knew that if she did, you would have made her keep Summer." Yatsuhashi replied. "You would have worked yourself to the bone to support Ruby and Summer. Ruby didn't want to put you through that. She...only wanted what was best for everyone else."

"She was always too selfless for her own good." Yang sighed. "Judging by the big empty house, I'd say you got your money though. Why not adopt Summer now?"

"I don't deserve her." Yatsuhashi answered. "I failed her and her mother when they needed me most. What kind of father could I possibly be? I did what I could to help her along, donating to the orphanage, sending her little presents, but I could never be her father. It wouldn't be fair to her."

"Bullshit." Yang scoffed. Yatsuhashi sunk in his chair. He did not have the slightest bit of fight in him. "I mean...I'm talking about your reasoning, not your truthfulness." That did not seem to lift his spirits.

"Never being able to be her father is the penalty I must suffer to atone for my sins." Yatsuhashi declared. "I will not be swayed." He paused. "Will you adopt her?"

"I don't know." Yang replied. "It's all...a lot to think about. I only found out today and I...I just don't know. I wanna' make sure she has the best life possible, no matter what."
"And I'm sure you'll do a better job than I've done thus far." Yatsuhashi managed a smile. "Those months I had with Ruby...it was the best time of my life, maybe the only time I was ever truly happy. She was everything to me. Even at the worst of times just one smile could make everything seem right."

"Yeah...she was special." Yang teared up. "I should...I need some time to think about all this."

"I understand." Yatsuhashi said.

"I should go, talk this over with my girlfriend, maybe with my shrink too." Yang declared.

"So you'll be going then?" Yatsuhashi asked.

"Yeah...I..." Yang started.

"Wait a moment." Yatsuhashi requested. He stood and walked to a nearby cabinet. He opened it and retrieved a binder. Yang also stood and approached him. "That year was full of wonderful memories for both Ruby and myself. You should experience them too." He handed the binder to Yang.

Yang opened the binder. It was full of photographs, photos of Ruby that Yang had never seen. "I...I can't take this from you." Yang gasped as she flipped through the pages, quickly scanning the pictures.

"I no longer need it." Yatsuhashi insisted. "Give it to Summer when the time is right."

Yang flipped to the back page. A small, folded paper was slipped into a pocket there. "What's this?" She asked.

"You shouldn't read that now." Yatsuhashi warned. "Wait until you're in a better place, with loved ones."

"Why?" Yang pressed.

"Before she gave birth...Ruby wrote you a letter." Yatsuhashi explained. "She felt guilty for never telling you, and she was afraid that there might be complications, and that she could die. That letter is her apology and her farewell. In the end the birth went smoothly and she never sent it, but I couldn't bring myself to get rid of it. Just...don't read it until you're sure you're ready."

"I...okay." Yang nodded. She closed the album. "Well, thank you for telling me all this. It...it couldn't have been easy." She gave him as strong a smile as she could manage.

"I'm glad I could get it off my chest." Yatsuhashi smiled back weakly. "The weight was crushing."

"See you later I guess." Yang shrugged.

"Farewell Yang Xiao-Long, it was an honor to meet you." Yatsuhashi declared.

Something about his tone, about his expression, bothered Yang. She wanted to say more, but she could not find the words. In the end she stepped forward and embraced Yatsuhashi. He awkwardly draped an arm over her back. After a few moments they parted and he saw her out. Yang slowly walked down the path, back to the street, her head filled with a maelstrom of emotions she could not process. She sat in the passenger's seat beside Glynda. She wanted to scream. She wanted to cry. She wanted to break something. But all she could manage to do was stare mournfully back at the manor, at the grim visage of the man standing in the doorway, his shoulders drooping, a sad smile on his face.
Glynda pulled up in front of the orphanage. Now there was another car out front, one Yang recognized. Winter had arrived. It was about time. Yang slipped out of the car and headed into the building with Glynda in tow. When she reached the playroom she was surprised to see a slightly sunburned Winter standing there wearing a bedlah. None of the children were around, but given the now late hour, that was hardly surprising. Winter was chatting with Blake, Velvet and Arslan, but as soon as she spotted Yang she rushed over and wrapped her in an embrace.

"Yang, are you alright?" Winter asked.

"I'm not doing great." Yang admitted. "But I'm better than I was."

"Then man you met with...was he..." Winter started.

"Yes, Summer's father." Yang confirmed.

"And her mother?" Winter asked.

"Uh-huh." Yang sighed. "My sister had a kid and never told me. She knew we couldn't afford it, so she gave her up. The father...Yatsuhashi's his name...he said Ruby didn't tell me because she knew I wouldn't let Summer go. Ruby...Ruby didn't wanna' be more of a burden than she already was."

"Yang I'm...God...I have no idea what to say." Winter sighed.

"That's alright." Yang shrugged. "How about you start by explaining that getup?"

"Oh...this...yeah..." Winter groaned. "I left my street clothes in the desert in Vacuo."

"You flew all the way home dressed like that?" Yang gasped.

"Coach." Velvet laughed.

"Wow, you did get here as soon as you could." Yang managed a chuckle. "You know, that's very see-through. I can see your thong...and your tattoo."

"Are you serious?!" Winter exclaimed. "Velvet, why didn't you say anything?!"

"I tried...but you wouldn't listen." Velvet replied meekly.

"Damnit." Winter grumbled. "The things I do for love."

"Thanks." Yang smiled. "I appreciate it."

"Um...I hate to interrupt...but it's getting late." Arslan cut in. "I'm afraid I have to ask you all to leave. You may return tomorrow if you wish."

"Oh uh...yeah, I guess it is getting late." Yang observed. "Alright...I guess we'll come back tomorrow. I'm pretty worn out anyway."

"We'll come back too." Blake agreed. Velvet nodded.
"Would you like me to as well?" Glynda asked.

"No, that's alright." Yang shook her head. "Enjoy your day off. Thanks...thanks for everything."

"Any time." Glynda smiled.

"Alright then, I'll pencil you in for a visit tomorrow." Arslan noted. "I look forward to seeing all of you again."

"...and then he gave me this photo album." Yang said, running her hand across the cover. She explained the situation in detail as Winter drove. "He was...he seemed like a good guy...really broken up about the whole thing."

"I can only imagine." Winter nodded.

"You do anything interesting today?" Yang asked.

"Besides taking a five hour flight dressed like this?" Winter laughed. Yang was not amused. "I...spoke with Summer."

"Yeah?" Yang sighed. "Thoughts?"

"I was thoroughly impressed." Winter declared. "She was well-spoken, intelligent and patient. She's also quite the little artist. I can see why she hasn't been adopted though, she's painfully shy. She seemed almost entirely unable to make eye contact."

"She sounds a lot like Ruby." Yang sighed.

"And she reminded me a lot of Weiss...before our father crushed her spirit." Winter added. She pulled the car to a halt in front of the house. The pair got out and headed inside.

Almost as soon as Yang got inside, her phone rang. She pulled it from her pocket and looked at it. "Looks like Raven heard the news." Yang noted. "This should be an interesting conversation."

Glynda heaved a heavy sigh as she closed the door behind her, tossing her pocket book onto the table beside the door. "Welcome home babe." Raven greeted her from a position lounging on the couch. "Where were you?"

"This one's a doozie." Glynda groaned.

"Did Pyrrha have another freak-out?" Raven asked, sitting up.

"If only it were that simple." Glynda shook her head. She walked over and plopped down beside Raven. "It's Yang this time."

"Oh?" Raven gasped. "What hap…"

"Apparently Ruby had a daughter she never told Yang about." Glynda explained. "Yang was visiting an orphanage with Blake and wham, she's face-to-face with her."

"Holy shit!" Raven exclaimed. "You should have called me! If ever there was a reason to ditch work this was it!"

"We got Yang calmed down alright." Glynda continued. "Turns out the kid's father has been
donating to the orphanage and giving Summer gifts, so we were able to contact him. Yang met with him, and he explained everything. Yang didn't give me all the details, and I can't really blame her."

"I should call her." Raven declared. "Right?"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea." Glynda agreed. "She could use all the support she can get."

"Hey mom." Yang answered the phone.

"Heya'...Glynda told me what happened." Raven noted. "Hell of a shock...huh?"

"You have no idea." Yang sighed.

"I...I know." Raven struggled to find the words. "Just...if you need to talk, you can call me anytime. Just say the word and I'll come running, I promise."

"I know mom, thanks." Yang declared.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Raven asked.

"No, not now." Yang replied. "I'm tired...and there's a lot I need to think about. I'm just gonna' go to sleep."

"Alright, I love you." Raven said.

"Love you too mom." Yang responded. She ended the call and slipped the phone back into her pocket.

"Yang, do you..." Winter started.

"That's alright Winny, I'm just gonna' lie down." Yang cut her off. With a sigh she slipped into the bedroom.

Yang did her best to sleep but it was simply not going to happen. Her mind was full of questions, worries and guilt. After trying and failing for several hours, she decided to give up. She slipped out of bed as quietly as possible, successfully avoiding waking Winter, and headed into the kitchen for a snack. Some pretzels and even a can of beer did nothing to quiet her screaming thoughts, so she plopped down on the couch and started playing some video games. The blocky crafting game had always been good for calming Winter, at least when she was not enraged by Yang's legion of dicks, but even constructing ever more elaborate phalluses did nothing to help.

A little after dawn Winter awoke to a cold, empty bed. Upon stumbling into living room, she found Yang passed out on the couch. The television was on, a video game on the screen, but Yang's character had long since starved to death. Yang snored, something she only did when she was deeply asleep, and Winter decided not to wake her. In the end it was almost noon before Yang woke up. She was still not well rested, and her position twisted up on the couch left her with several annoying aches and a crick in her neck. Yang clearly needed some time to get herself sorted, so Winter called to push the orphanage visit back until after lunch.

Winter did her best to cook as Yang showered. Yang had taught her a few things, but she was still highly incompetent. The best that could be said of her cooking was that is was edible...most of the time. The food was still not ready when Yang finished her longer than usual shower, so she stepped out on the deck. Leaning against the railing, Yang gazed out at the sea until Winter called her in to
eat. Yang remained silent through the meal, and Winter did not press. After eating they hopped in the car for a silent ride to the orphanage.

"Good day Ms. Altan." Yatsuhashi greeted.

"You know, I'd love to put a face to the voice too." Arslan added. "Perhaps you could come visit, see Summer…"

"I'm afraid that's not possible." Yatsuhashi refused. "I just wanted to thank you for taking care of Summer, and all the children, for all these years. You're truly an angel."

"Thank you Mr. Daichi, but I'm just…" Arslan protested.

"You've gone above and beyond." Yatsuhashi cut her off. "Anyway, I've mailed a fairly sizable donation check. It should arrive in a few days. It will be my last donation, but it should be enough to secure the institution's financial future."

"The last, but why?" Arslan asked. "Is it…"

"Thank you again Ms. Altan." Yatsuhashi interrupted. "May you find happiness and good fortune. Farewell."

"Mr. Daichi, what…" Arslan started, but Yatsuhashi hung up. His tone of voice, the things he said, it all made Arslan very uneasy. She called him back, but there was no response. She was about to try again when the buzzer in the reception area rang. She sprung up and rushed to the front, finding Winter and Yang waiting there. "Ms. Xiao-Long, have you spoken with Mr. Daichi since yesterday?"

"Uh...no, why?" Yang asked, more than a little confused.

"He just called me and...I have a bad feeling." Arslan replied. "I fear her might do something rash."

"Oh shit...he is going to kill himself." Yang gasped.

"What?!" Winter demanded.

"I was wondering why he would give me the photo album, and his farewell seemed so final...it didn't seem right." Yang explained. "I've been thinking it over, and I didn't want to believe it but…"

"Someone's got to stop him!" Arslan shouted. "I can't leave. Maybe we should call the…"

"I'll go." Yang declared. "If anyone can talk some sense into him…"

"Less talking, more going!" Winter advised. "Time is critical!"

Yatsuhashi sat at his desk. He read the note he had typed on his laptop again. It said everything he wanted to say. It would explain his reasons to his family, not that he really cared. He was beyond caring what they thought, but at least they would know, not be forced to wonder. He turned his attention to the revolver set on the ornately carved mahogany desk. The weapon was richly etched with geometric patterns. The weapon's beautiful appearance made it no less deadly. It was a show
piece, but it could blow his brains out all the same. When he had purchased the gun all those months ago, it had been with the intention that he would use it on himself, but he had never worked up the courage. Besides, he had to make sure Summer was taken care of first. Now that Yang had found her, he was no longer needed.

Yatsuhashi picked up the gun and turned it over in his hands. He checked that it was loaded, for the third time, and slid the cylinder back into place. He was vaguely aware of some thumping sounds, but ignored them. He took a deep breath and positioned the barrel under his chin. His whole body tensed, but he could not do it. Hyperventilating, he lowered the weapon. He took another shot of whiskey, his fifth, but felt no drunker, or braver. He poured himself another. He was determined to do it. They may have called it the coward's way out, but he was finding himself entirely lacking in the courage to take it.

**WHAM!**

The commotion was now too loud to ignore.

**WHAM!**

It was coming from the front door. With a sigh, Yatsuhashi got up and walked toward it.

**WHAM!**

He could hear grunting and heavy breathing outside now. He opened the door. Yang was standing there, soaked in sweat, her shoulder already starting to show a bruise. "Ms. Xiao-Long." He said.

"Don't Ms. Xiao-Long me!" Yang shouted. "What were you doing?!" Yatsuhashi said nothing. "Answer me!"

"I was planning to end my life." Yatsuhashi admitted.

Yang stepped forward and slapped him, hard. "What the hell is wrong with you?!" She demanded.

"Summer has you now." Yatsuhashi replied. "She no longer needs me. No one needs me. I am free to join my love in the next world."

Yang slapped him again, just as hard. "Are you fuckin' serious?!" Yang raged. "Do you have any idea how pissed Ruby would be? If you think I'm angry, shit…"

"I do not desire to live any longer." Yatsuhashi declared.

"Too fucking bad." Yang seethed. "I'm not going to let you harm everyone who cares about you like this. Get your head together and stop being an idiot."

"I…" Yatsuhashi started. He paused. "I'm sorry." He bowed his head and his shoulders drooped.

"How were you going to do it?" Yang asked.

"I have a firearm." Yatsuhashi answered.

"Give it to me." Yang commanded.

"Yes ma'am." Yatsuhashi sighed. He led Yang inside to his office. She could not help but notice how red the room was. There were red paintings, red curtains, red wall hangings and a red rug. The paintings in particular caught her attention, she recognized the style and immediately realized who the artist must be.
Yatsuhashi picked up the revolver and handed it to Yang. "Any other guns?" Yang pressed. She slid the cylinder open and dumped the bullets on the floor before slipping the weapon into her pocket.

"No." Yatsuhashi replied.

Yang reached into her other pocket and pulled out her wallet. After searching it for a few seconds she produced a card and handed it to Yatsuhashi. "You're going to call that number, and you're going to get help." Yang ordered. "Dr. Goodwitch helped me when I was in your shoes. Now she's going to help you. You're going to get better, for Ruby, for Summer."

"I will call." Yatsuhashi promised. "I will...do my best, for them."

"Good." Yang huffed. "Now, do I have to hang around to keep an eye on you, or can I trust you to not do anything stupid?"

"I won't kill myself." Yatsuhashi declared. "I am truly sorry. Thank you for caring."

"You need to thank Arslan too." Yang noted. "She sent me here. You're going to do it in person too."

"Yes ma'am." Yatsuhashi agreed.

"Now, I'm going to leave, but I'm going to call every once in a while." Yang warned. "You are going to answer immediately. If you don't, if you even consider doing something stupid, I swear I'm going to come back and kick your ass."

"You are a strong woman, Yang Xiao-Long." Yatsuhashi observed. "I can see where Ruby got her determination. You did well raising her."

"Thank you." Yang smiled. "But don't think being a kiss-ass is going to make me any less angry at you."

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Yang returned to the orphanage feeling a little worn out. Aside from the workout she had gotten while trying to bust down Yatsuhashi's door, the whole situation was a real drain on her energy. With a heavy sigh she walked inside and was immediately approached by Arslan. "Is he alright?" She asked. "Did you get there in time?"

"Yeah, I got there." Yang replied. "I took his gun away and gave him my therapist's number."

"You left him alone?!" Arslan demanded.

"I wouldn't worry too much." Yang shrugged. "After the talking-to I gave him...well...I bet he's afraid that if he killed himself I chase him down in the afterlife just to beat the shit out of him."

"You have that effect on people." Winter chuckled, walking up behind Arslan. "I guess that means Glynda has a new patient. If she had kids we'd be putting them through college."

"So, what did I miss?" Yang asked.

"Blake, Velvet and I talked to Summer a little more." Winter replied. "She's wonderful."

"She really is." Arslan agreed. "I just wish the other kids could see it."

"What does that mean?" Yang pressed.
"She has some...difficulties, with bullying." Arslan explained. "She's different, and that makes her a target. She lacks confidence, preferring to read or draw instead of playing with the others. When they tease her, she takes everything to heart, she withdraws, and it just repeats. I do my best to keep an eye on her, to shield her from the worst of it, but I'm the only one here a lot of the time, and most of the other children require much more supervision. I'm sorry I haven't done a better job."

Yang's fists were tightly clenched, her knuckles white. Her head was bowed, face hidden by hair. "T-that's Ruby to a t-tee." Yang struggled. "You don't have to apologize...it's not your fault." Yang looked up with tears in her eyes. "Can I...can I meet with her?"

"Of course." Arslan nodded.

"Do you want any of us to be there with you?" Winter asked.

Yang shook her head. "No, this is something I should do alone."

Yang took a few minutes to compose herself before taking her seat in the meeting room. She had to wait a little longer while Arslan went to get Summer. She spent the time alone thinking about the situation and what she would do to make things right. Summer could not remain in the orphanage, that much was certain, but where could she go? Yatsuhashi was not going to take her in, and in his state it would be a bad idea anyway. Yang could do it, but would she be a good mother? The entire situation showed she had clearly failed Ruby in that respect. If she had been a better mother, maybe Ruby would not have gotten pregnant and hid it from her, maybe the whole mess never would have happened. Where had she gone wrong? She had done everything she could, everything she thought was right.

The door opening snapped Yang back to the present. Arslan smiled at Yang as Summer walked in, her head down, as she slowly made her way to the seat across from Yang. Summer hopped into the chair, clasped her hands in her lap, and kept staring downward. "If you need anything just shout." Arslan offered before closing the door.

"Hi...Summer." Yang struggled, doing everything she could to suppress the emotions bubbling just below the surface.

"I'm sorry." Summer apologized.

"Sorry...for what?" Yang asked.

"Miss Blake told me I scared you yesterday." Summer replied. "I didn't mean to. I'm sorry."

"Oh, no, you don't have to be sorry." Yang replied. "You didn't really scare me. I was just...really, really surprised."

"Why?" Summer asked.

"You...look like someone..." Yang sighed.

"Who?" Summer asked.

"My...my sister, Ruby." Yang answered. She pulled a picture from her wallet. "Take a look." She held the photograph out to Summer who hesitated but took it. "That's her when she was your age."

"I guess you're the other girl." Summer suggested, finally looking up. Yang nodded. "Are those your parents?"
"Yeah, my father's name was Taiyang, and that's Ruby's mother...her name was...was...Summer."
Yang managed. She choked back the tears she could feel coming on.

"Summer...I...I don't understand." Summer said.

"Ruby...Ruby's your mother." Yang explained. "I...never knew she had a child."

"I have a mother?" Summer asked. "Then why am I here? I thought only kids without parents live
here?"

"Ruby...we didn't have much money." Yang sighed. "She knew we couldn't afford to give you the
life you deserve, so she gave you up, hoping you would be adopted by a family that could."

"Can I...can I meet her?" Summer asked.

"I'm...afraid not." Yang looked down.

"Why, where is she?" Summer pressed.

"She's...she's with the Maidens now." Yang choked a sob.

"Oh...so I don't have a mom after all." Summer slumped in her chair. "I thought...maybe I could
leave. I don't like it here. Miss Arslan is really nice, but the other kids are mean to me sometimes."

"I...I heard." Yang wept. "I...I can't let it continue."

"Does that mean you'll adopt me?" Summer asked.

Yang looked at Summer wide-eyed as tears streamed down her face. "I...I don't know." Yang
admitted. "I'm not...I don't think..." Sobs overcame her, cutting off her speech.

"Miss Yang?" Summer gasped. She hopped out of her chair and wrapped Yang in a hug. "I'm sorry,
I didn't mean to..."

"No, don't apologize." Yang cried, draping an arm over Summer's back. "This isn't...it was very nice
to meet you. I'll...be back. I'm...I'm going to get you out of here, I promise."

"It was nice to meet you too Miss Yang." Summer smiled. She held out the photograph. Yang took
the photo and slipped it back into her wallet. "I can't wait to have a real family."

"Here, have this." Yang offered. She pulled another photo from her wallet and passed it to Summer.
"That's your mamma all grown up. Keep it."

"She's really pretty." Summer declared.

Yang managed a smile. "Yeah, she...she is."
Yang staggered out of the meeting room with tears streaming down her face. Arslan slipped into the room behind her to retrieve Summer. Yang collapsed on a sofa in the reception area. Winter rushed over, sitting beside her and cradling Yang as she cried. It took Yang quite a while to regain her composure, but no one rushed her. They all knew it was going to be very difficult for her but that it was something she could, and would, work through.

"She can't stay here." Yang finally declared, sniffing. "I can't just stand by and do nothing while she's tormented."

"Do you...want to adopt her?" Winter asked.

"I...I don't know." Yang stammered. "I'm...I don't know if I'm ready. I don't want to take her out of here just to put her in another bad situation. Summer deserves better. I...I can't rush into this. But I can't leave her here anymore knowing how hard it is for her."

"We could take her in." Blake suggested. "Velvs and I have already been vetted. It would only take a few signatures."

"Are...are you sure?" Yang asked. "What if..."

"We could start on a temporary basis, and if you decide you want to, you can adopt her." Velvet noted. "It would get her out of here sooner, and give you time to make your decision."

"I don't want you to feel pressured..." Yang started.

"We all think Summer's great." Blake declared. "We'd have no problem adopting her permanently."

"Then maybe you should." Yang sighed.

"Yang, you're family." Velvet shook her head. "If you want to adopt her, you should be able to. We'll love being her aunts as much as we would being her mothers."

"That's...I...alright." Yang agreed. "Arslan...would that work?"

"It's a little unorthodox, but given the circumstances there shouldn't be any problems." Arslan replied. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait for tomorrow though. I can't entrust her to your care without approval from a social worker, and the bureaucracy doesn't operate on weekends."

"But..." Yang protested.

"I'll keep a very close eye on her." Arslan declared. "I promise. I'll give you the paperwork now, and we'll get the necessary approvals first thing in the morning."

"I guess that's alright." Yang nodded. "You guys are sure?"

"We are." Velvet confirmed. Blake nodded her agreement. "For the record, I think you'd make a great mom."

"Until yesterday I wouldn't have doubted it." Yang sighed. "But thanks for the vote of confidence. It really means a lot."
"Welcome to your new home!" Velvet cheered. She opened the apartment door, allowing a giggling Summer to rush inside. As Arslan had indicated, finalizing the process had been very quick, and Summer had been given over to their care before midday. "I guess she likes it." Velvet ducked inside, followed by Blake, Yang and Winter who carried suitcases loaded with all of Summer's possessions.

Summer rushed around, exploring the new space. It was not quite a penthouse, but it was rather large. The main room was full of rich colors, mostly reds and browns, with mood lighting to further brighten the space. Her first stop was a tall, abstract stone sculpture. Yang and Winter had given it to the Belladonnas as a gift, mostly as a joke. It was pretentious and indecipherable, and Summer did not linger very long before moving on to the next curiosity. A life sized statue of a man towered over Summer. The bearded figure held a strange animal under one arm and his other hand was outstretched, clutching a can of beer. Summer took a closer look at the weird animal and laughed before moving on again.

"What the f...fudge...Blake?" Yang asked, standing before a wallhanging she had never seen before. The small tapestry depicted a multi-limbed deity surrounded by various patterns and geometric shapes. Bizarrely, what seemed to be monochromatic pictures of several female celebrities' faces were being held by two of the hands, with another pasted on its face.

"We got that on our honeymoon." Blake explained. "Velvs laughed for a good five minutes when we first saw it. There was no way we weren't getting it."

"The lady in the store looked angry." Velvet added.

Summer rushed up to Blake and tugged on her sleeve. "Miss Blake, where is the bathroom?" She asked.

"It's right in there." Blake pointed. "And you don't have to call me Miss Blake, just call me...hmm...actually, I don't know what you should call me yet."

"How about we go with aunt for now?" Velvet suggested. Blake shrugged but seemed to accept her decision. "Aunt Blake and Aunt Velvet."

"Okay." Summer agreed.

"You can go to the bathroom." Velvet noted. "You don't have to wait for permission."

"Okay." Summer nodded. She rushed toward the door.

"Do you need help?" Blake asked.

"No!" Summer called back as she slipped inside.

"She's painfully cute." Winter cheered. "Just say the word Yang. I'm ready to take her home right now."

"Yeah...I still need to think about it." Yang sighed. She glanced at the clock, a novelty design with all the numbers replaced by fives and the slogan 'It's Five O'Clock Somewhere' accompanied by a wine glass on its face. "How about I make us some lunch?"

Winter knew Yang was dodging the question, but now was not the time to push. Blake and Velvet knew it too and looked to Winter for guidance. When she did nothing they took her lead. "That sounds lovely." Velvet smiled. "All the excitement has me pretty hungry."
After lunch, the group played a few board games, then Summer sat down to do some drawing. The few hours they had spent together had already been quite fun, but the night was young. Shortly after getting to the apartment, Blake had asked Summer if she minded meeting a few of her new guardians' friends, and the little girl had agreed. The quartet had already planned to have their friends over to meet Summer, and with her consent it was decided to go ahead.

There was a knock at the door and Blake got up to answer it. As soon as she turned the knob it burst open, Nora charging in with a box in her hand. "I brought cake!" Nora cheered.

"Cake?" Summer gasped, looking up from her artwork.

"Yeah, we thought we'd have a little party to celebrate you coming home with us." Velvet explained.

"A party, awesome!" Summer giggled. "I love parties!"

"Well, Summer, meet Nora." Blake introduced. Sun and Pyrrha followed Nora in, much more subdued in their demeanor. "Sun and Pyrrha, Summer."

"Hello." Pyrrha smiled.

"Hey." Sun said.

"You're hair's really pretty Pyrrha." Summer praised.

"Thank you." Pyrrha blushed.

"Why is your shirt open?" Summer asked Sun.

"So everyone can see my abs." Sun explained. Summer did not seem to understand. "Uh...it was too hot."

Summer jumped up and rushed over to Nora, who was placing the cake box on the kitchen table.

"What kind of cake is it?" Summer asked.

"That's a surprise." Nora chuckled.

"Once everyone's here we can start eating it." Velvet noted.

"There's more?" Summer asked. "You have lots of friends."

"I guess we do." Velvet laughed.

"Knock knock." Raven said, walking through the still open door. Glynda rolled her eyes.

"And here they are." Velvet declared. "Summer, meet Raven and Glynda."

"You look like Yang." Summer observed, looking at Raven. "Are you sisters?"

"Oh, you little charmer." Raven chuckled. "I'm Yang's mommy."

"If you're Yang's mommy, and Yang's sister was my mom...does that make me my grandma?" Summer asked.

"She giveth and she taketh away." Glynda smirked.

"Oh, no." Raven groaned. "I'm not Ruby's mom. I..."
"Can I call you grandma anyway?" Summer asked, an innocent smile on her face.

"I'd like it better if you called me Rave." Raven replied.

"Okay Rave."

"So, can we eat the cake now?"

Blake laughed. "Sure."

As the others finished off the last of the cake, and Summer answered questions about herself, Yang slipped away, ducking into Velvet's art studio. When she emerged she was carrying a rectangular object hidden by wrapping paper. "What's that?" Summer asked, noticing Yang.

"What kind of party would it be without a present?" Yang chuckled.

"A present?"

"For me? But it's not my birthday or anything."

"It's still a day to remember though." Velvet noted.

"Here you go." Yang placed the object in front of Summer. "Be careful opening it."

Summer smiled and knelt before the present. Taking Yang's warning very seriously, she found an edge in the wrapping paper and slowly pulled at it. The covering fell away, revealing a painting of a forest that featured trees with red leaves. "Wow... it's really pretty." Summer declared. In awe, she carefully examined the work. "I love the color."

"You like red huh?" Blake asked.

Summer nodded. "It's my favorite color." She confirmed.

"Your mother painted that." Yang explained. "She loved red too."

"A lot of the gifts I got in the orphanage were red." Summer added. "The color just makes me feel so...so warm!"

"I'm glad you like it." Yang smiled. She was glad Summer had not asked where it had come from. Yatsuhashi had actually gifted it to her years before, but with no place to put it in the orphanage, Arslan had been forced to keep it in storage. Yang was still not sure how she would explain that situation to Summer. Yatsuhashi did not want Summer to know he was her father, but Yang did not want to lie to the girl. At some point she would have to figure something out, but that was a problem for the future.

"We'll put it up in your room." Velvet suggested.

"Cool!"

"So Summer, are you an artist too?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah!"

"I love to draw and color. Those are my drawings on the fridge!"

"I draw stuff too, but Pyrrha never puts my stuff on the fridge." Nora complained.

"Because you're an adult, and her art is better." Pyrrha teased. "Plus, your preferred subject matter isn't appropriate for public display."

"What do you like to draw?" Glynda asked.
Animals, Miss Glynda." Summer replied. "And people too. Everything I guess."

"Oh, you don't have to call me Miss Glynda." Glynda laughed. "Call me grandma."

"Okay grandma!" Summer giggled.

"Aren't you getting a little ahead of yourself?" Raven chuckled. "You don't even have kids."

"I have plenty of children, crazy, crazy children." Glynda smirked, casting her glance at those around her.

"It's hard to argue with that...mom." Pyrrha joked.

The action moved from the kitchen to the lounge. Blake turned on the TV, some cartoons for Summer, and the little girl watched the brightly colored characters intently as the adults chatted. "You know, I was expecting Summer to be bouncing off the walls." Sun laughed. "I guess that's what I get for hanging around kids who literally spend their time bouncing off the walls. Hmm...maybe Summer would enjoy parkour..."

"Parkour?" Summer asked.

"Sun, swear to God, I will cut you." Yang warned.

"Alright, alright." Sun backed off. "She's still a little young for classes anyway."

"You're not going to be like this with our kids, are you?" Pyrrha sighed.

"Of course I am." Sun smirked. "Their training starts as soon as they can walk."

"You're having kids too?" Summer asked. "Are you adopting?"

"Oh, no, we're having them...naturally." Pyrrha explained.

"Wanna' feel our bellies?" Nora asked.

"Bellies?" Summer tilted her head in confusion.

"That's where the baby's growing!" Nora exclaimed.

"Both of you?" Summer asked.

"Yep, Sun gets to be a double-daddy." Nora cheered.

Summer hopped onto the couch between Pyrrha and Nora. With one hand on each she rubbed their bellies, giggling. Nora cackled as tiny fingers tickled her, while Pyrrha smiled and sighed contentedly. "They're gonna' know who their parents are." Summer sighed. "I wish I knew who my dad was."

Yang gulped, casting her gaze downward. Winter stepped up to save the day. "Maybe one day honey." Winter encouraged. "You never thought you'd find out who you mom is, but that happened. It could happen for your father too."

"Yeah!" Summer exclaimed. "I hope so!" Yang breathed a sigh of relief.

"Here, have a candy." Nora reached into her pocket, producing a crinkling sound and pulling out a gummi bear. Summer eagerly took it and popped it in her mouth, happily chomping on the gooey
"Thanks for the save." Yang whispered to Winter.

"No problem." Winter responded. "You'll need to figure out what you're going to tell her eventually."

"Yeah, I know." Yang groaned. "Just another decision I have to make…"

Yang battled through another night in which her sleep was fitful at best. Solstice Modeling had nothing scheduled for the day, so she would get to spend it at home with Winter. She considered going to visit Summer again, but decided they both probably needed a break. Summer could use a day without her overly-emotional aunt hovering over her, and Yang could use some emotional rest. Unfortunately, there would be no rest for Yang. No matter what she did, her mind always returned to Summer, and Ruby.

An object on the table kept drawing Yang's attention, as if it were shouting at her. The photo album Yatsuhashi had given her was the 500 pound gorilla in the room. There was simply no ignoring it any longer. "Hey uh…Winter…you got a minute?" Yang asked, walking up behind Winter.

"What's up?" Winter asked, looking away from the newspaper.

"I wanted to look through the album." Yang replied. "It probably wouldn't be a great idea to do it without your support."

"Oh, alright." Winter nodded. She folded up the paper and put it on the table. "Are you sure you're ready?"

"I'm not sure about anything anymore." Yang sighed. "But I can't stop thinking about it. At this rate it'll drive me nuts whether I look or not." She grabbed the album and sat on the couch beside Winter. "I flipped through it when he gave it to me…but I wasn't really paying much attention. Every time I saw Ruby's face…I just had to keep turning the pages."

"Well, let's take a good look at it, together." Winter suggested.

"Here goes nothing." Yang opened up the album. The first images were group shots, Ruby and her friends. Yang had seen most of them before. They were probably taken in the first few days of orientation. Soon the group of people in the photos narrowed, now down to Ruby's closer friends, her inner circle. "I wonder if they all knew. I guess there wouldn't have been any hiding it after a while."

"I'm sure they did everything they could to help out." Winter encouraged.

"She looks so happy." Yang observed. In every photo Ruby was smiling, sometimes laughing. Even as a noticeable bulge began to grow in her belly, she looked like she was having the time of her life. Maybe she was. Yang came to a photo that was far different from the ones around it. It appeared to be in a doctor's office, with Yatsuhashi and what looked like a doctor at her side. Yang looked closer. It was Ruby, looking at an ultrasound, Summer already well formed in her womb. There was a joy on Ruby's face, but also a sadness in her eyes. She must have known by then that she would be giving Summer up for adoption. She could see it in Yatsuhashi's face too. He was smiling, being brave for his love, but there was pain evident in his expression. Yang turned the page, back to pictures like the others. A now obviously pregnant Ruby was wearing pajamas, sitting in Yatsuhashi's lap, one arm around his waist and one around his neck as he hugged her from behind. "He looks so young."
"What do you mean?" Winter asked.

"When I met him...if I didn't know better I'd think he was in his mid thirties." Yang explained. "The stress and guilt must have aged him terribly." She shook her head. "I wonder how I avoided the same fate. Maybe it was because I was keeping it together for Ruby." She pressed on. Ruby's belly continued to expand and Yang knew the end was near. Then she turned the page one more time. The mix of seemingly random shots gave way to a single, full-page photograph. "Oh my God…" Yang gasped.

"They all look so happy...but not happy." Winter noted.

The photo showed Ruby lying in a hospital bed, baby Summer in her arms and Yatsuhashi at her side. "It was the only time they got to be a family." Yang choked. She realized she was crying. She flipped the page again, to one last image. It was Ruby, her smile forced, suitcases in her arms. It must have been right when she was leaving for home. "I...no wonder."

"What?" Winter asked.

"When Ruby got home, she seemed so down." Yang groaned. "I get it now. I finally get it. I thought it was because she was sick but...she'd just had the happiest time of her life, and she knew it was over. She knew it would never be the same. No matter what she did, whatever happened, there would always be that guilt and regret."

"But she still had all those wonderful memories." Winter countered. "I'm sure those never left her."

"I only ever wanted her to be happy." Yang wept. "I thought the cancer made her suffer...but she was suffering already. And I had no idea. I didn't fix it, I couldn't."

"Yang, you did everything you could." Winter declared. She pulled Yang over, allowing her to sob into her shoulder. "You gave everything to make Ruby happy, and even if it was only for a few months, your sacrifice allowed her to experience such joy. I'm sure she was grateful, more than you know."

Yang continued to sob. "I...but...why did it have to go so wrong?"
The next day Yang was still worn out. She did not have any work to do for Solstice, but Winter should have gone in. For some reason she remained home. For Yang it was just as well, she could use the company and support. Still well before noon, there was a knock at the door. "Who knocks on the door of a beach house?" Yang asked.

Winter smirked, got up, and answered it. A man in a suit stood there, holding a clipboard. "Hello...Ms. Schnee." The man said. "I'm Roy Stallion from Social Services."

"Nice to meet you, and please, call me Winter." She said.

"Uh...Winter...what's going on?" Yang asked.

"I thought you might want to adopt Summer, so I worked with Arslan to get the process started." Winter explained. "Mr. Stallion is here to check that our house is suitable."

"I should only be a few minutes." Roy declared. Winter followed him as he walked around the house, making occasional notes on his clipboard. He paused at the beat-up kitchen table and looked at it curiously.

"Strange, I know." Winter chuckled. "It has history, and character."

Roy shrugged and moved on. "You don't seem to have a child's room." He noted after checking the rest of the house.

"I'm sure you're aware of our financial situation." Winter noted. "If we do decide to adopt, we can very quickly acquire the necessary furniture."

"Alright then." Roy nodded. "I don't think there will be any trouble with the approval process. I'll be in touch."

"Thank you Mr. Stallion." Winter smiled. She shook Roy's hand and he departed.

"Winter...we didn't even talk about this." Yang complained.

"In case we decide to adopt Summer, I wanted to be prepared." Winter countered. "Hell, I want to adopt her. I thought it better to get the paperwork and bureaucracy out of the way as soon as possible."

"I guess you're right." Yang sighed. "You keep forcing me to think about it though."

"Isn't that for the best?" Winter pressed. "Shouldn't you be thinking about it?"

"I wish I could stop thinking about it for like five minutes, but I can't." Yang replied. "It may not seem like it to you, but this is really hard for me."

"I know." Winter declared. "And I'm going to give you the time you need, and support you whenever you need it. I'm just not going to let you off the hook. You need to make a decision, for your sake and Summer's."

Yang slumped on the couch. "Don't I know it."
Yang spent the rest of the day and most of that night thinking. What Winter had said about her not being able to avoid a decision stuck with her. There were other things Yang was avoiding beside the decision on Summer. She had gone through the album of photographs, but there was one last bomb waiting inside - Ruby's letter. Yang was going to have to read it at some point, face the no doubt painful words it contained. Already the week had torn open all the old wounds of Ruby's death, and opened new ones besides, but there was no sense in putting it off any longer.

"Are you sure?" Winter pressed. "Maybe you should wait, calm down a bit…"

"No, I have to do this." Yang cut her off.

"There's something to be said about pacing yourself…” Winter protested.

"And there's something to be said about just doing it." Yang countered. "Let's just…let's just get this over with."

"Do you want me to read it to you or…” Winter offered.

"No, I'll do it." Yang declared. She unfolded the paper. It was Ruby's handwriting alright. "This is it Win, Ruby's last words. Once this is over, that's it. Ruby'll never speak to me again."

"Yang,

I'm sorry I did this to you. You deserved better from me, but I got myself into this situation and I've got to handle it as best I can. I hope you don't have to read this. I hope I can go through with this and move on with my life. But I'm scared. Anything could happen in childbirth, and it's making me paranoid. I've kept these secrets from you, and you always taught me to be honest, but I can't put this on you. You've always taken care of me, you've always protected and supported me, for once I want to do the same. You've got enough on your plate as it is, and if you're reading this, I've made everything worse.

I'm sorry Yang, I fucked up. Not by falling for Yatsu, don't put any of this on him or I swear I will haunt your ass! He's a good man, the best I could have asked for. He would have thrown away his life for me, but I don't want him to. I don't want an accident to ruin what he has with his family, even if it's for stupid reasons. He's like you in a way. He just wanted to help me, to take care of me, and I fell really hard, and I got excited and now this happened. It's my fault and mine alone, and I'm gonna suffer the consequences like an adult. I hope.

The doctors say my baby will be a girl. I'm gonna name her Summer. I hope she looks like me, I hope she lives a good life whether I live or die. I wish I could be part of it, but I'm tired of being selfish. I hope she doesn't hate me for it, even if she should. I still get angry at mom sometimes, you know that. It's stupid, but it's natural. You should be angry at me too. Don't try to bottle it up and forgive me because I'm your little girl and I did my best. Yes, I did my best, but that doesn't mean it was right. It's just what I thought I should do, and it's gonna hurt, it's gonna hurt really bad. I hope I can live with it. I hope I get to.

I'm rambling. This is like, the third time I've written this, and I'm running out of tissues. I know how you're gonna be. You'll wanna take Summer in, and if you do, there's nothing I can say that will stop you. I know Yatsu is gonna break. He's a big softie, and he loves me more than I deserve. He'll blame himself for this, but it's not his fault. Tell him that, please. I don't want him to live in misery. I've got enough on my plate, being gone and all. I hope if there's an afterlife I can see mom again. If I do, I'll tell her you love her, and we're the best sister ever, because you are Yang. You always did your best for me, and I love you, and I'll miss you. Please don't let my death hold you back. Mourn
Yang settled in in front of the laptop in the business center. She was closing in on a decision, propelled by Ruby's letter. Ruby expected Yang to take in Summer in the event of her passing. The last thing Yang wanted to do was disappoint her sister. But it was still not so simple. Yang still doubted her fitness for parenthood, truly believing that Blake and Velvet would give Summer a better life. There was more than just one terrible possibility Yang had to consider. Ruby died young from cancer. Ruby's mother died young from the same cancer. Could Summer too?

Yang threw herself into the available material on Ruby's cancer. It was not encouraging. Even if caught early, it was still usually fatal. There was no reliable way of fighting it, just various techniques that worked in some but not in others. The odds of Summer suffering from that cancer were not encouraging either. As best as Yang could tell, it was 50-50. As likely as not, Summer would suffer Ruby's fate. It terrified Yang. Could she really deal with it happening again?

"It's not fucking fair!" Yang screamed. She stood, gripped the laptop, and threw it. It tumbled through the air, slamming into a bookcase and smashing the vase it held. "Why her?!" Yang picked up a paperweight and threw it at the nearby television screen with all her might. It scythed straight through, punching through the wall behind it as well, carrying across the guest room and embedding in the wall on the far side.

"What's going on?!" Winter demanded, bursting into the room. "What the hell?!"

Winter rushed to Yang's side, sliding to the ground and wrapping her in a tight embrace. "It's okay." She soothed. "It's okay. Everything's going to be alright."

Melanie stood in front of Solstice Modeling HQ. The building was smaller than she had imagined, but it was intimidating all the same. As far as her modeling career was concerned, it was her last chance. After she had been fired by her previous employer, only Solstice had even offered her an interview. At this point she was reduced to basically begging for a job. It the answer here was no, and it probably would be, she would almost certainly be forced to go back to the bar to work for her adoptive father again. It was not a terrible job, but the place held too many memories she wished she could forget.
Yang came to work late. After a night of sleep that was fitful at best, Winter had let her sleep in. Then she spent some time repairing the damage she had done to the house. Permanent repairs would have to wait until she had a chance to stop at the hardware store, but at least the damaged electronics had been disposed of and the drywall dust vacuumed up. As she approached Solstice Modeling HQ, she was surprised to see a familiar face out front. "Mel?" Yang asked.

Melanie was snapped from her thoughts, jumping and turning to face Yang. It was the first time she had seen her in person in years. Sure, Yang's ads had inspired Melanie to apply with Solstice, but they had had no contact. She was not sure if she should laugh or cry. "Xiao-Long?" She gasped.

"Don't Xiao-Long me." Yang laughed. "Come here!" She stepped forward and pulled Melanie into a hug as the latter froze up. "It's been years! I'm sorry I never visited but, well, you know how things went and I didn't want to push my luck by going back. How have you been? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here looking for work." Melanie replied, still shellshocked. She maintained a steady voice and a straight face. "I've been...surviving."

"So you _did_ get into modeling!" Yang cheered. "Awesome! So did I. Well, I kinda' fell into it, got really lucky after I left and it all kind of snowballed. Where's Mil? Is she inside? How's she been?"

Yang's voice was gentle, too gentle, like Miltia's, like when she knew Melanie was in a bad place and she needed to tread lightly, when she was liable to break. She was breaking now.

"Mil's...gone...s-she..." Melanie sobbed. She slumped into Yang's arms, and she quickly secured her hold on the weeping girl. "She's gone Yang. She left me, a-and I can't handle it."

Blake peeked out. Yang waved her away, Blake nodded and ducked back inside. "Mel, sweetie, I need you to look at me, okay?" Yang instructed. Melanie choked and sniffled, pulling away to look at Yang. "Come inside. We'll get you some tissues, a latte, and someplace comfortable to sit, and we can talk about this, okay?" Melanie nodded and allowed Yang to direct her inside.

After dropping Melanie off in the breakroom where Blake made her some coffee, Yang headed off to see Winter. "Win, Mel's here to see you." Yang announced.

"Malachite?" Winter asked.

"Or Xiong, whatever name she's going by." Yang shrugged.

"Bring her on in." Winter requested.

"She's crying in the breakroom." Yang sighed. "Something about her sister being gone."

"Oh…" Winter trailed off.

"What happened?" Yang asked.

"She and her sister were models." Winter explained. "Her sister...committed suicide a few months ago. After that Melanie was moody, occasionally violent. She was fired from her last job after she broke her boss' nose. She's basically unemployable."

"If she's unemployable, why is she here?" Yang asked.
"I want to give her a chance." Winter replied. "I understand her loss. Everyone here does. The way I see it, with Glynda's help and our support, she can turn her life around. If that happens, we'll gain a valuable and dedicated employee for life."

"And if she can't turn it around?" Yang asked. "Just playing devil's advocate here."

"It's no big loss." Winter shrugged. "I'm just giving her a chance."

Yang returned to the breakroom. Melanie had cleaned herself up, and was now nursing her latte. Yang sat beside her, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Hey, how're you feeling?" Yang asked.

"Better." Melanie replied. "Thank you Yang."

"I didn't know you were coming." Yang noted. "Would've caught up with you before if I did."

"It's okay." Melanie sighed. "You've uh...come a long way...working for the woman you punched."

"Heh, yeah, well, she's actually my girlfriend." Yang chuckled.

"No shit?" Melanie gasped.

"No shit." Yang confirmed. "Turns out she's a massive masochist."

"The only type who could handle you." Melanie joked, eliciting a laugh from both.

"It's a long story, but I'll tell you another time, or hell, ask Winter herself," Yang smirked. "I've gotta' go. I'll be back later, but trust me, Win understands. You can be honest with her. It's better if you are. We're family here, you can talk to us about anything."

Melanie nodded, looking down. She allowed Yang to hug her again, before she got up to leave. Melanie flinched as the door closed. She swallowed, fumbling with her cup, tracing the patterns in the cardboard, trying to lose herself in them, trying to still her beating heart and will the nerves away. She could not afford to lose her cool, not now. This was all or nothing, her last chance, live or die.

"Ms. Malachite?" Winter asked, slipping into the room.

"Ms. Schnee, thank you for meeting with me." She finally managed. "I apologize for my appearance. I'm not at my best. I promise I will improve given the chance."

Winter sat beside Melanie, who shifted over to give her more of the couch. It was unnecessary, but anything to show more than due respect could tip the scales in her favor. "I am aware of the circumstances, and I sympathize. After all, I went through the same thing, hence my unacceptable behavior in the club that night."

"Oh...Yang said you two are together?" Melanie asked.

"When I extended my apologies, she extended a helping hand. We both attended therapy together, and the rest is history."

"I will be forever thankful." Winter smirked.

Melanie chuckled dryly. "So...I..." She started.
"You are in a very precarious place Ms. Malachite, all but blacklisted." Winter cut in.

"I know." Melanie sighed. "I know...sorry I...I just snapped. It was hot, the boss was a misogynistic pig and he...he said something that set me off. It's no excuse, and I really, really fucked up, but I won't do it again, I promise. I...please just give me one chance, I'll prove myself."

"I will give you one chance, one, on several conditions." Winter offered.

"Anything." Melanie begged.

"First, before anything, you will attend therapy." Winter demanded. "Glynda is a very dear friend. She can and will help you if you give her the chance. She helped me, she helped Yang, as well as most of your future coworkers."

Melanie blanched. Suddenly, heat flared across her hands and she gasped. In her anxiety she had crushed the latte cup in her hands, the still hot beverage splashing over them. She flung the cup away, sending its remaining contents splashing across the floor. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry!"

She hyperventilated. "Please don't kick me out. I'll do anything! Please, j-just..." Firm arms pulled her close, and Melanie shuddered as she once again felt that comforting familiarity.

"It's okay, it's okay Melanie." Winter encouraged. "You're fine. You haven't done anything wrong. Nothing will happen to you. Just breathe, calm down."

Melanie sniffled and nodded against Winter's chest. "I'll do it...I-I promise." She declared.

"I know, just relax for now." Winter soothed. "We can deal with that later."
Indecisive

Chapter by RealTerminal

Arslan heard the buzzer on the front door ring. There were no scheduled visits, but sometimes prospective adopters would stop in unannounced. She checked that none of the children were misbehaving before slipping away. As she entered the lobby she immediately spotted an abnormally tall man with short black hair. "Can I help you?" She asked.

"Ah, Ms. Altan." The man said. "I'm…"

"Mr. Daichi." Arslan finished for him. "I'd recognize that voice anywhere. It's a pleasure to finally meet you in person."

"Please, call me Yatsuhashi, or Yatsu if you wish." Yatsuhashi requested.

"Only if you call me Arslan." She countered. "So, what finally brings you here?"

"I've come to apologize." Yatsuhashi replied. "I've been foolish, and I worried you. I would also like to thank you. Had you not sent Ms. Xiao-Long...we likely would not be having this conversation."

"I forgive you, but I can't accept your thanks." Arslan waved him off. "I should be thanking you for everything you've done for the children. Would you like to meet them?"

"No, I shouldn't." Yatsuhashi shook his head. "I do not deserve the privilege."

"Nonsense." Arslan scoffed. "After everything you've given them, it's only…"

"I abandoned my daughter, and the love of my life, then nearly ended my own." Yatsuhashi cut her off.

"You made some mistakes." Arslan countered. "We all do. Through your donations, I'd say you've more than made up for it. Your charity paid for almost everything here. The children's clothes, their toys, books, the playset outside...hell, before your donations I had trouble keeping the lights on. You gave them a life they never would have had otherwise. Please, at least let me give you a tour. Let me show you everything you've given them. I can tell the children you're an inspector if that helps."

Yatsuhashi thought for a moment. "Very well."

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Yang and Winter spent the weekend with the Belladonnas and Summer. It was a joyful weekend, full of laughs, games and fun. Summer seemed thrilled by almost anything. Watching cartoons, playing board games, some hide and seek, and video games all seemed to fill her with glee. Even more boring moments, when they chatted, when the read to her, when Summer sat drawing, filled her with happiness.

After Summer went to bed on Sunday night, the adults stayed up to talk. "She's so happy." Yang noted. "I don't think I've ever seen a kid go so long without crying or throwing a tantrum."

"She's spent her whole life in an orphanage." Winter observed. "Being here...it must all be magical for her."

"Yeah, I guess so." Yang sighed. "I just...I wish…"
"I know." Winter put a hand on Yang's shoulder.

"She's a very good kid." Velvet declared. "She doesn't complain about anything, she does what we ask. I couldn't hope for a better child."

"I think her favorite food is chicken but she's been willing to eat everything we put in front of her." Blake added. "My guess is she's used to not having a choice. We let her choose dinner on Friday night, and she was over the moon."

"She's so good." Yang smiled. "She's so easy to love." She paused and looked around at the others. "I think I have my decision."

"The paperwork is already filled out." Winter informed her. "You just need to sign it and we'll file it in the morning."

"I don't want to take her from you…" Yang started.

"Like we said from the start, she's yours." Blake cut in. "We both knew you'd end up adopting her."

"Yeah, there was never any question in our minds." Velvet confirmed. "We're just grateful for the week we had."

"You...thank you." Yang began to tear up. "This means more to me than you could know."

"I think we have some idea." Blake smirked.

"I guess...I guess it's decided then." Yang chuckled. "It might take a few days but...I'm adopting Summer."

Yang sat at the kitchen table, a half-full cup of coffee growing cold in her hands. Winter arrived, fresh from her shower, and sat across from her with a steaming cup of her own. "Come on, shower." Winter encouraged. "If we don't get to the office early we'll have to wait in line."

"Winter I...I don't think I should do it." Yang sighed, staring down into her mug.

"What?" Winter gasped.

"I...I just want to do what's best for Summer." Yang explained. "I can't just think about me."

"But this is what's best for her." Winter noted.

"Is it?" Yang asked. "No. What she needs is a mother who won't lapse into a fit of PTSD whenever something remotely bad happens to her."

"You've never overthought anything in your life." Winter groaned, shaking her head. "Please don't start now."

"If I have to overthink one damn thing in my life, it may as well be the most important thing for three lives." Yang countered. "Hell, five. This isn't just about me. It isn't even just about us and Summer. Blake and Velvet are in this too, and I care about them too much to screw this up for everyone."

"You're being a big, dumb, idiot." Winter scoffed.

"Yeah?" Yang grumbled. "I raised a little, dumb, idiot who got herself pregnant and didn't tell me, so…"
"Who didn't tell you for the best thought out, most logical and selfless reasons." Winter cut in. "I'd say you did a damn good job of raising her."

"I bet Summer will love hearing that when she's old enough to understand why her mother abandoned her in a fuckin' orphanage!" Yang shouted.

"What, in hopes she would have a better life than her?" Winter insisted. "Because she wouldn't be able to afford to put food on the table? Because she wanted what was best for everyone involved?!

"Because...she...AAAURGAH!" Yang screamed. She threw her coffee mug over Winter's shoulder. It shattered against the kitchen tile, splashing its contents all over the floor.

"You only throw things when you know I'm right." Winter noted.

"Fuck you and your rightness!" Yang yelled. She stood and kicked the 2x4 leg of the table, then recoiled in pain. "Stupid fucking table! I hate you! Argh!" She proceeded to beat her fists on the table and assaulted it with more kicks and knees. Still it held firm.

"I'm legitimately impressed by its sturdiness." Winter observed, a smug smile on her face. "You did a great job attaching that leg."

"RRRGH!" Yang roared. She finally flipped the table, Winter having just enough time to get herself and her coffee out of the way. Breathing heavily, Yang stalked out the back door. She walked to the balcony, leaning against it and staring out at the ocean.

"Yeah, we'll need to hold off for a few days." Winter spoke into the phone. "Yang's getting in her own head."

"I figured she might." Blake responded on the other end. "No problem. We can hold onto Summer for as long as she needs."

"I'm sure it won't be long." Winter declared. "You know her."

"You need me and Velvs to come in today?" Blake asked.

"Not until the afternoon." Winter replied. "We're doing a test shoot for Melanie."

"Alright, I'll see about getting a babysitter." Blake said. "Maybe Glynda. Ooh, or Nora and Pyrrha."

"Hmm...try Glynda first." Winter suggested. "I know it would be valuable practice for Pyrrha and Nora, but that couple's overall sanity is at an all-time low."

"I know what you mean." Blake chuckled. "Maybe I could bring Summer in."

"Not today." Winter advised. "Given Melanie's recent history of outbursts...I would rather not have Summer there, at least until I have a better read on her."

For her first shoot with Solstice, Melanie wore a somewhat artsy, upscale dress, a strapless ivory number with a fur collar. It was a style she had gravitated towards in the past. Blake jumped at the opportunity to apply makeup that was bolder than usual. Blake appreciated how stock still Melanie held, barely flinching as she applied the thick black eyeliner and eye shadow. It was a welcome change from Nora, who was a hassle at the best of times, even though her pregnancy shoots did not require much makeup work. Melanie remained almost entirely silent, through both makeup and
With the preparation done, the shoot was set up. Solstice was a little less populated than it had been. Nora, Pyrrha and Sun were babysitting Summer, and Glynda was working nearly nonstop to cover Pyrrha's appointments. As a whole the family was quite busy, with only Winter, Yang, Blake and Velvet present with any consistency. Winter had even offered to give Yang the day off due to her episode in the morning, but she had insisted on coming in. She wanted something to keep her mind off the situation, and being on the job was as good a way as any to distract herself.

Once properly dressed and made up, Melanie stood prepared under the harsh studio lights. It had been some time since her last, disastrous shoot. She had spent that time living with her adopted father - Junior Xiong - as without a job she was no longer able to afford her own place. Things had not been the best between the two, between grief of loss and his anger at Melanie for wishing to continue the career that had so recently driven Miltia to her death. Things had been tense, and Melanie was getting tired of it. The sooner she could guarantee paid work, the sooner she could move out, the sooner she could be alone.

Blake and Yang hovered on the sidelines as Velvet made the final adjustments to her camera and the lighting. She looked to Melanie and raised an eyebrow. "You ready?" She asked.

Melanie shot Velvet a sufficiently blank look before nodding. She struck a pose and Velvet smiled, ducking behind the camera to take the first picture, then the second, then the third. Each flash was followed by a pose change, a blur to her vision, and a muffle to her hearing. Melanie missed this, but it was not the same. Pictures were memories, captured light representing a moment in time, the location, the people, the experience, all saved in an instant for the world to see, for them to behold. Melanie and Miltia were known for their bond, their shared visage, the implied intimacy of their body language.

So rarely had Melanie been alone in this position. Miltia was always at her side, or her back, in her arms, fingers entwined with her own, expensive perfumes mixing with her own scent. She could almost imagine she was still there, in those brief flashes of light. She could feel her presence, her warmth. But it was only a fantasy, a lie, glimpses of a life she no longer had. She was not warm, she was cold. She was alone, Miltia was gone. She would never hold her hand, never hold her close, never gaze lovingly into her eyes, never kiss her, like no one else could kiss her. She was gone, forever. Melanie was cold. Melanie was alone...alone...alone...

"Mel?" Yang called out.

Melanie gasped, suddenly aware of the world around her once more. A light pressure on her shoulder drew her attention to the sight of Yang, lilac eyes wide with worry, boring into her. "I'm fi...I'm fine." Melanie swallowed.

"Mel, you're crying." Yang observed.

Melanie reached up to her cheek. Touching it, her fingers came away wet, stained black with eyeliner. The sight shook her, suddenly drawn back to the fateful night, when she had found her sister's lifeless body, dried eyeliner streaked down her pale cheeks. Melanie felt her breath hitch and she hung her head, clenching her teeth in an attempt to will the memory away.

"Guys, could you give us a bit?" Yang requested. Blake and Velvet left, leaving Yang and Melanie alone. "Mel...Melanie, it's okay. You can let it out. It's just you and me."

Melanie shook her head, but did not resist as Yang pulled her into a hug. She shuddered. "It's just me." Melanie wept. "It's only me. She's gone and I'm all that's left."
"That's not true." Yang countered. "You've got Junior, you've got me, you've got us."

"You're not her, Yang." Melanie sighed. "None of you are."

"I know." Yang conceded. "We're not her, no one ever will be, she's gone and nothing will change that. I know how it feels Mel."

"You...I..." Melanie stammered. "We were more than that Yang. We...we..."

"Mel?" Yang asked.

Melanie hunched inward, her body shaking from withheld sobs. "We were never anything less than each other Yang." She cried. "We were always there. She was always mine, and I was always hers, even when we tried not to...I lost my sister Yang! My sister, my partner, my other half...she was everything to me. She was my entire world and now she's gone! That...that fucking...that...she left me alone Yang! She took my heart and she promised to keep it safe and then she left!" She slumped in Yang's arms, and Yang gripped her tighter, gently bringing her to the ground as she collapsed, continuing to hold Melanie as tears soaked into her shirt, until the sobbing faded to hitches, and finally, sniffles. Yang ran her fingers through Melanie's hair. "I fucked up, didn't I?"

"No, Melanie." Yang replied.

"I got fired the last time." Melanie countered.

"You're not getting fired." Yang insisted.

"You...you don't judge me...do you?" Melanie pressed.

"I don't." Yang confirmed.

"Everyone...everyone else did...or they fetishized it." Melanie sighed. "I dunno' how I feel about that."

"Have you talked to Glynda about this?" Yang asked.

"No, I was afraid." Melanie answered.

"Glynda won't judge you." Yang declared.

"Maybe she should." Melanie groaned.

"Melanie, look at me." Yang commanded. Melanie pulled back enough to meet Yang's serious gaze. "I won't pretend to be entirely on board with what you and Mil had, but as far as I'm concerned, love is love, and a sister is a sister, and it sucks to lose them. You remember how bad I was with Rubes. You two did this for me at the time."

"Yeah, you looked like shit." Melanie shared a small chuckle with Yang.

"I did, and it sucked, and I know I wasn't the best person to be around back then, but you still tried, and you helped, if only a little." Yang nodded. "But it was enough to last me until Winter came along, and now here we are, and it's my turn, so please, let me help you, let us help you. We don't mind giving you time to get your head on straight. We all understand, we were all there in our own way. That's why Winter gave you this chance. You really think she's gonna' turn you out because you're not done mourning? Fuck those other assholes who fired you. They saw you as an asset. We see you as a member of the family, and we stand by our family."
Melanie bit her lip, then looked down at Yang's shirt. "I think I stained your shirt." She sighed.

"Hmm?" Yang asked. She glanced down. "Meh, if it doesn't come out I can use it as a rag or something."

"So...you got a new bike?" Melanie asked.

"Yeah, Bumblebee." Yang confirmed. "I'll take you for a ride sometime."

"Pass." Melanie scoffed. "I actually like living...most of the time." Yang huffed and Melanie managed a smile. She leaned back against Yang, properly returning the embrace. "Can we just stay here for a while...I miss being held."

"Sure." Yang agreed. "Winter might get jealous though."

"Hmm...let her," Melanie chuckled.

Yang gave a wave to the surveillance camera tucked away on the ceiling in the corner of the room. She could almost hear Winter's eyes rolling. "You doing anything for lunch?" Yang asked.

"I was planning to starve myself." Melanie deadpanned.

"Pfft, well change of plans missy." Yang laughed. "Family lunch. Gotta' put some junk in that trunk."

"My ass is fine Yang." Melanie protested.

Yang smirked. "Take a look at Blake's, then tell me that again."

"I think she still needs a few weeks of therapy before she'll be ready." Yang declared. Sitting behind her desk, Winter nodded in agreement. "I'm not sure there's much we can do with her until then, but she needs a paycheck to get her life on track."

"I can't pay her in full until she actually start working, but I can make sure she has enough to get by." Winter agreed. "I'm just relieved she didn't do anything...rash."

"I have a hard time imagining her lashing out violently." Yang noted. "That guy must have been a real prick to drive her to it. She's just...so depressed, it's a fucked up situation."

"You did well, consoling her like that." Winter praised.

"If I just stood by and watched, what kind of friend would...well, not friend...ex-co-worker?" Yang rambled. "Tolerated acquaintance? Eh, whatever. It was the right thing to do."

"I knew you'd make a fantastic mother." Winter smirked.

"What?" Yang asked.

"If you can console a manic-depressive adult with a history of violence and a family history of suicide, you can console a crying child." Winter explained. "No pun intended, but that's child's play by comparison. You saw someone in pain, and your first instinct was to step in and do something. And don't just say it's because you're a good person. Blake and Velvet are too, but they were too taken off guard to act. You have the instincts and personality to be a great mom."

"Maybe you're right." Yang sighed. "And I suppose if it really doesn't go well, Blake and Velv
would take her in again."

"I wouldn't worry about that." Winter encouraged.

"Knowing you, you have the paperwork with you." Yang suggested.

Winter reached into her briefcase and produced the papers. "They just need your signature, then we can take them to make it official." Winter smiled.

Yang hesitated, but only for a moment. "Give me a pen." Yang requested. "Let's do this."
Yang and Winter stood outside the Belladononas' apartment door. Yang knocked firmly with one hand, clenching Winter's with the other. The door was opened by Blake, who's already grinning face brightened even further. "Hey, come in." Blake invited, stepping aside. "We're just watching cartoons."

The trio headed to the lounge. Velvet waved from her position on the couch, with Summer snuggled in her lap. "Aunty Yang!" Summer exclaimed, leaping up at the sight of her. Yang knelt down to allow Summer to rush into her arms. Yang squeezed her, but not too tightly. Ruby had always complained about how tightly she could hug, Yang knew her strength, and she just loved squeezing the life out of her sister. Summer, on the other hand, she treated like she was made of glass. Maybe when she was older she would get the full experience.

"Hey Yang, Winter, how's it goin'?" Velvet asked.

"Quite well, thank you." Winter replied with a polite bow. "Yourselves?"

"So far so good." Velvet answered. "No one else has fallen pregnant, as far as I know."

"I've considered stocking the bathroom with tests, just to be on the safe side." Winter joked. Blake and Velvet shared a laugh at that. Yang pecked Summer on the temple, and the little girl giggled before detaching. She ran over to hug Winter around the legs, and Winter smiled, reaching down to stroke her hair. "Summer, Aunt Yang and I need to talk to Aunt Blake and Velvet."

Summer nodded before returning to the couch, where Blake wrapped her in a hug. "Just go to your room for a bit." She requested. "We shouldn't be long."

"Mmkay!" Summer nodded before running off down the hall. At the sound of Summer's door closing, Winter took a seat on the couch. Yang stared down the hall for a minute longer, before joining Winter.

"You've given things thought?" Blake asked.

Yang chewed her lip, nodding. Winter pulled the adoption papers from her bag, placing them on the coffee table. "I haven't signed them yet." Yang noted. "Blake, Velv, I don't wanna' take Summer away from you if she belongs here."

"She belongs with family Yang." Velvet declared. "You're all she has. It's up to you."

"But you're family too Velv, both of you are, and you love her." Yang countered. "You love having her here, and she loves you too. You work together...I don't know if she'll work with me. I can't make this decision alone."

"Well, why don't you ask Summer?" Blake suggested.

"She loves you too Yang." Velvet added. "She misses you when you're gone, draws you, and Winter...she draws all of us really, but she really goes all out on you. She gets all shy if you try to..."
look before she's done though."

"Just like her mother." Yang sighed, shaking her head and huffing a chuckle. She rubbed her eyes as they stung, swallowing the lump in her throat that threatened to burst forth. Winter's hand squeezed her shoulder and she took a deep breath. "Okay...I'll ask Summer."

Yang knocked twice on Summer's door, hearing a muffled chirp. She pushed in, closing it behind her. Summer sat on the bed, book in her lap. "Hey, whatcha' readin'?" Yang asked.

"Scarlet Rose." Summer replied. "It's really cool!"

Yang chuckled, laying down on the bed next to Summer. The little girl put the book aside and snuggled up to her. Yang wrapped an arm around Summer, enjoying the familiar feeling. It had been so long since she could do this. "Summer, I need to make a very big decision." Yang announced.

"What about?" Summer asked.

"You staying here, or coming with me." Yang replied.

"I like it here." Summer declared.

Yang's eyes stung again, and she squeezed them shut. "Yeah, I know." She managed.

"But I like you too." Summer added.

Yang hugged Summer a little tighter. "I like you too Sum, and I wanna' take care of you." Yang smiled. "I want you to be happy. We all do. They all say it's my choice, but I don't think that's fair. You haven't had a choice all your life, so I wanna' give you one." Yang looked down, meeting Summer's wide, silver eyes. She swallowed. "Do you wanna' stay here with Blakey and Velvs, or do you wanna' come with me and Winter?"

Summer blinked, but did not look away. Yang found holding her gaze difficult but unavoidable. She never thought she would look into those silver eyes again. It filled her with as much joy as sadness, creating an emotional whirlwind that churned in her gut, made worse by the warmth of the little body pressed against her side. "Won't Blakey and Velvy be sad if I go?" Summer asked.

"They'll be a little sad, but they just want you to be happy." Yang replied.

"I'd miss them." Summer noted.

"You can visit them anytime you like Summer, I promise." Yang declared.

"Does this mean you'll be my mummy?" Summer grinned.

"Yeah, if you want." Yang nodded, tearing up. "I'm your aunty though. My baby sis is your real mummy, don't ever forget that, okay?"

Summer nodded, then climbed on top of Yang, hugging her as fully as her arms could reach, giggling. Yang hugged her back, squeezing until she squeaked. "Too tight!"

Winter drove the sedan, with Yang the front passenger. The car was a fairly recent purchase, made when Winter tired of her convertible. As fun as it was she missed the comfort of a big luxury car. Sure, it was something of a reminder of the accident that had claimed Weiss' life, but she saw its purchase as another step in coming to terms with the tragedy. It was fortunate that she had made the
purchase, because it was now necessary. In the back, Summer sat in her car seat, craning her neck to look at the scenery as Winter slowly rolled the car down the long drive toward the house.

Finally, the trees and shrubbery thinned out, revealing the modern structure, set against the beach behind it. "You live at the beach?!" Summer exclaimed.

"Yep." Yang confirmed. She had spent the past few minutes struggling to watch Summer in the mirror, taking joy in the faces she made. "Cool huh?"

"I love the beach!" Summer cheered. "Miss Arslan took us a few times. We got to swim and build sandcastles! It was awesome!"

"And now you get to do it all the time." Yang smiled.

"Ah, but no swimming unless Yang or I are present." Winter warned. "Safety first."

Summer's mood was not dampened by the warning. As soon as Winter pulled the car to a stop, she undid her belts, opened the door and slid out of the spacious back seat. She rushed around the house and onto the sand, Yang and Winter in hot pursuit. "Wow!" Summer gasped as she took in the sights. "Where are all the people? When Miss Arslan took us to the beach there were so many people."

"It's a private beach." Winter explained. "So it's just us. That gives us lots of room for sandcastles."

Summer giggled and rushed back to the house, climbing the steps onto the porch. She opened the screen door and pressed her face against the glass door beyond, straining to see inside. "You don't have to squish your face." Yang laughed. "We're going in." She slipped the key into the lock and opened the door as Summer moved out of the way.

"Your mother painted them." Winter declared. "We have even more in the other rooms. There were too many to hang up!"

"That's a funny table." Summer chuckled, pointing to the beat-up kitchen table.

"I brought that with me when I moved in." Yang noted. She thought for a moment before her expression darkened. "Ruby ate at that table…"

Winter saw Yang slipping and jumped in. "Summer, would you like to see your room?" She asked. "Yeah!" Summer replied.

"Follow me." Winter said. She walked to the door of what had once been the guest room. She paused, then with a flourish, threw the door open. "Ta-da!"

Inside the room had little furniture, but the walls were adorned with several paintings. There was a bed with red covers, and a television on the wall. "It's so big!" Summer gasped. It was indeed much larger than the room she had occupied while living with the Belladonnas.

Yang twitched. "Yes." She nodded. "It's a big room, which means we can put a lot of stuff in here!"

"What kind of stuff?" Summer asked.
"Fun stuff!" Yang cheered. "Beanbags and toys and anything you want!"

"You're trying so hard not to say…" Winter smirked.

"Shaddap." Yang cut her off.

Summer leapt onto the bed and wrapped herself in the covers. "Don't get too comfortable." Winter warned. "We're going shopping."

"Shopping?" Summer asked. "For what?"

"For you!" Winter exclaimed. "We're going to get clothes, and furniture, and toys, whatever you want."

"Can I get a pony?" Summer asked.

"Uh…no." Yang replied. "Do you…do you really want one?"

"Not really." Summer shrugged and chuckled. "Can we get some art stuff too?"

Yang breathed a sigh of relief. "Of course!"

Winter and Yang took Summer to the mall to do some shopping. It was to be a major endeavor, covering everything Summer would need, from clothes to furniture to toys. First up was clothing. Summer had a bit from the orphanage, and the Belladonnas had added to her wardrobe, but she could still use some additions. Winter knew high fashion, but her knowledge of casual clothing was still sorely lacking, so she left things up to Yang and Summer.

Winter sat in a chair by the fitting rooms, watching her partner follow their newly adopted daughter through the aisles. It was strange to think of her that way, daughter, Summer Rose, now Summer Xiao-Long by law. Xiao-Long, not Schnee. Not her wife, not her daughter. Even Blake had seen fit to marry Velvet. Sun, Nora and Pyrrha would probably be next, however that would work. The only thing stopping Glynda and Raven seemed to be lack of concern. Perhaps they thought themselves past that. Perhaps their love was enough.

Was this enough? For her? For Yang? How did it make her feel, seeing her friends marry? Did Yang want to marry? Did Winter? Had she stayed under her father's thumb, she would have been married off eventually, most likely to some rich, arrogant heir who saw her body and wealth instead of her heart. Had that line of thinking forever ruined her view of marriage?

But Yang saw Winter's heart. It had brought them together, even as they lied to themselves, reveling in each other's bodies, brushing aside their true passion as carnal desire, all for nothing. They had fallen in love, and Winter gave her life to Yang, starting anew by her side. And now they had a child. It seemed they had skipped a vital step. If they married now, would it just be out of obligation? Could it, would it be something they truly desired?

"Win?" Yang asked. "Wakey, wakey!"

Winter jerked, meeting Yang's lilac gaze. She smiled, shaking her head free of the cobwebs. "Sorry, lost in thought." Winter laughed it off. "Did Summer find anything she likes?"

"She piled a bunch of stuff into the trolley." Yang replied, pointing to the overflowing cart. "Took a few things into the changing room. You okay? You had a really intense look just then."
"I'm fine Yang." Winter answered. "Did she only get clothing? What about underwear? Socks? Shoes? Hats?"

"We can get 'em next." Yang shrugged. "Let's just enjoy the show for now."

"Aunty Yang, Aunty Winter, look!" Summer called, leaping from the changing room in a yellow shirt and tan shorts.

"Lookin' stylin' Summer." Yang praised. She nudged Winter.

"Yes, very bright." Winter added.

"Try on something else!" Yang encouraged. Summer giggled, grabbed some things from the trolley and ran back into the fitting room.

"She's already taking after you." Winter joked.

"God I hope not." Yang shook her head. "You couldn't handle two of me."

"That doesn't inspire the image you intended Yang." Winter smirked. Yang slapped Winter on the shoulder, laughing.

"Look, I'm Aunt Winter!" Summer announced. Yang and Winter turned to see her wearing a white singlet top and blue skirt.

"Oh God." Winter chuckled.

"Oh, that's cute!" Yang cheered. Winter noticed her bleary eyes. "Did she warm your frozen heart?" Yang smirked.

"Oh har-har." Winter scoffed.

"She's such a cutie." Yang declared. "If she grows up to be anything like you it'll be awesome."

"Oh hush." Winter waved her off. "It's you she should take after."

"What?" Yang demanded. "And be a bimbo?"

"You are not a bimbo." Winter countered. "Leave it alone. I was drunk and stupid."

"You were cruisin' for a bruisin' for sure, but you weren't wrong." Yang sighed.

"Yang, don't say that about yourself." Winter admonished.

"You saw my grades Win." Yang reminded.

Winter reached for Yang's hand, clasping it in both her own. "Average to above." Winter noted. "You weren't bad. Your strengths just lay in more practical subjects. You've seen me in the kitchen."
"You're learning." Yang protested. "You can, you know, not burn pancakes now, and you're great at chopping stuff. You're better than me with a knife for sure."

"Sure, I can chop things up and remember to flip when the batter bubbles, but you're amazing." Winter asserted. "Your cookbook grows every year, plus you're basically a mechanic and carpenter! You can do these amazing things I can't wrap my head around because it's full of numbers. You're a beautiful, amazing woman Yang Xiao-Long, I love you...I want to be yours for the rest of my life." With that, Winter tilted her head and kissed Yang, who reciprocated passionately, sliding her hand to lightly caress Winter's neck, Winter threading her fingers through Yang's mane.

"Eew!" Summer yelled.

Winter and Yang broke, turning to face the intrusion just as the door to the fitting room slammed shut. Exchanging a look, they chuckled. Pulling away, Winter smoothed her skirt and blouse, schooling her posture. Yang just slouched back, arm not leaving Winter's shoulder. "It's okay, Sum, you can come out now." Yang laughed. "It's safe."

Summer peeked out. Seeing it was indeed safe, she stepped out fully. Yang's breath caught. Summer was wearing black tights with a crimson skirt, her black t-shirt emblazoned with a red rose. "I look like mum!" Summer cheered.

"Yeah...yeah you do." Yang managed. "You're just as beautiful as she was Sum. Here, lemme' get a picture for Grandma Rave." Yang fumbled for her phone, struggling to free it from her tight jean pocket. Winter pulled her own from her purse, switching on the camera and handing it to Yang, who took it with a tight smile. "Big smile!"

Summer grinned toothily, clapping her hands. Yang snapped a picture and grinned at her. "Go on Summer." Winter encouraged. "Can you do Aunt Nora?"

"Yeah!" Summer exclaimed. She grabbed the appropriate garments and ran back into the changing room.

Winter wrapped her arm around Yang, who sat hunched over the phone, staring at the image and struggling to hold back her tears. "She's so beautiful Win." Yang sniffled. "Our daughter, our baby girl, Ruby's baby girl, Summer Xiao-Long."

Winter chewed her lip. "Legally she's your daughter." She noted. "I'm still a...Schnee."

Yang looked at Winter, confused at first, but smiled. "Then let's fix that." Yang suggested. She stood, fiddling with Winter's phone for a moment before dropping to a knee, taking Winter's hand and holding the phone before her, a picture of a diamond ring on screen. "Winter Schnee, will you do me the honor of putting up with my weird last name, for the rest of our lives?"

Winter blushed, laughing, even as her eyes stung. "Gladly." She leaned forward, meeting Yang in another fiery kiss that was sure to send Summer fleeing again.

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After purchasing more clothes than Summer could probably ever wear, they moved on to furniture. The adult bed was replaced with a child-sized model, and properly sized furniture was added. Yang and Winter had expected to be buying a lot of pink, but Summer broke the mold, preferring red, black and purple. Instead of cutesy pieces designed for kids her age, she preferred more adult pieces, including a lamp with a stained glass shade. It was not just adult, but artistic as well. All the while Yang struggled to keep her composure. Ruby had been the same way. Summer seemed a little confused, but Yang insisted on a beanbag chair to finish it all off.
After the boring trip to the furniture store, it was time for fun. Yang and Winter brought Summer to a toy store, but were surprised by her general lack of interest in most toys. She only seemed to care about things she could use for art, like painting kits and big boxes of crayons. More at Winter's insistence than anything else, they did buy her a giant teddy bear. The trip looked headed for a let down, but Yang came to the rescue. She knew exactly the sort of thing Summer would love, and that she would love too for that matter.

"Pick out a few kits." Yang encouraged, leading the others to an aisle filled with sets of plastic snap-together building blocks.

"Get as many as you want." Winter smiled.

"I always wanted to play with these, but the other kids usually got to them first." Summer noted, gazing at the shelves of sets. "It's like art you can play with!"

"That's right." Winter nodded. "Go ahead. Maybe this…" She trailed off as she noticed Yang picking up a few sets and placing them in the trolley. "Yang, what are you doing?"

"Winter, I only just realized it now." Yang replied. "I'm an adult. I'm rich. I love these things. I could have been buying them for years! Look at how cool this stuff is!" Winter looked but seemed unimpressed. "I'm going to get all the kits I wanted as a kid…and I'll build huge replicas of awesome stuff! And I'll put them all in a big cabinet to show them off!" She looked back at a somewhat amused Winter. "Are you going to tell me I'm too old for this?"

"Yang...live your dream." Winter chuckled.

Between Yang and Summer, they came away with over a dozen sets. It was terrifyingly expensive to Yang, even after several years of living in luxury, but Winter did not care. She saw it as a fantastic opportunity for family bonding, and she was a bit curious herself. Anything that brought them all closer together was worth the price tag.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long, long story, plus laziness.
Chapter by RealTerminal

Winter sat at her desk, tapping at her PC in an effort to get her Vacuo desert shots just right. After paying through the nose for someone to do the post production work when Solstice Modeling first started, she had taught herself photo editing. Now she was just as good as or better than most professionals. Still, it could be tedious work, and her perfectionism only made it worse. Forget spending several hours on a single image, she could spend hours finding the ideal spot for the company watermark.

There was a knock at the office door. "Come in." Winter called.

Yang pushed through the door with Summer. "Blake and Velvs need my help." Yang explained. "Can you watch Summer for a bit?"


"It's Nora." Yang replied before rushing out.

"Hmm...fair enough." Winter said to no one in particular.

"Aunty Nora had her boobies out!" Summer giggled.

"Of course she did." Winter groaned, covering her face.

"Why does she have heart nipples?" Summer asked.

"Gah...because she has lots of love to give or something…" Winter grumbled.

"I want to be a sloth when I grow up!" Summer announced.

"Maybe you should spend less time with Nora." Winter thought aloud. She ducked down into one of the drawers of her desk. "I think I have some candy and something to draw with." She could hear the pitter-patter of Summer's feet as she rushed over. "Or do you want to watch a video or something?"

Winter sat up, placing a pad and some crayons on the desk. Unfortunately Nora had discovered the candy stash - despite Winter's best efforts to hide it - and it was empty. Winter quickly flipped through the pad, ensuring Nora and Yang had not left any lewd drawings behind.

"Who's that?" Summer asked, pointing to the picture on Winter's desk.

"That's Weiss, my little sister." Winter replied.

"When will I get to meet her?" Summer asked.

"She...she's with Ruby and the Maidens." Winter sighed.

"Oh...what was she like?" Summer asked.

"She was...really nice, and really pretty, just like you." Winter replied. She patted the top of her leg and Summer hopped up to sit on her lap. "We had a lot of fun together."

"Doing what?" Summer inquired.
"Well, when she was your age, I remember this one time she tried on my high heels." Winter smiled. "When I found her she was all bruised and scraped from falling down, but after that she was a pro at walking in them. And then there was the time she tried on my makeup. She put on way too much and ended up looking like a clown!" Summer giggled. "Sometimes, if there was a storm, or she had a bad dream, she would sneak into my bed in the middle of the night. She even did it when she was older. It was a little annoying to be woken up, but it was nice."

"Did you play games or anything together?" Summer asked.

"Not really." Winter frowned. "Our family was...strange. We didn't get to see each other too much."

"That's sad." Summer observed.

"Yeah, it was." Winter confirmed. "We did have lots of snowball fights though. She always loved the snow."

"I've never seen snow." Summer sighed.

"Well, we'll just have to take a trip to Patch this winter." Winter suggested. "We could play in the snow, maybe go skiing or even-" Winter's phone rang, the business line. "Sorry Summer, I have to take this."

"It's okay." Summer hopped off Winter's lap. Winter handed her the pad and crayons and Summer laid down on the floor to draw.

"Solstice Modeling, Winter Schnee speaking." Winter answered the phone.

"Um...hello...I...uh..." A woman said.

"Who is this?" Winter asked, taking charge of the conversation when she noticed the woman's hesitance.

"K-Kali...Kali Belladonna." The woman replied.

"How can I help you Ms. Belladonna?" Winter asked.

"Um...does...does a Blake Belladonna work for your organization?" Kali asked.

"As a matter of fact she does." Winter answered. "Would you like her for a shoot-"

"No, no, that's not it." Kali cut her off. "She's...my daughter."

"Oh." Winter managed. She tried to remember anything Blake had said about her parents, but could remember nothing. Nothing bad, nothing good, nothing at all. "How can I help you?"

"Would it be possible for me to speak to her?" Kali asked. "I...I haven't talked to her in years."

"I'll tell her you're on the line, but I won't force her." Winter warned. She did not know why Blake had never mentioned her parents. It was possible that their relationship had been a bad one and that she did not want to reconnect with them.

"Of course." Kali said. "I understand."

"I'm putting you on hold." Winter noted. She tapped the phone and set it aside, picking up the receiver for the building's PA system. "Blake, please come to my office." Then Winter sat back and waited. She watched as Summer colored happily. Could there come a time when she would not
speak to Summer for years?

"What's up Win?" Blake asked, striding into the room.

"Blake...is your mother's name Kali?" Winter asked.

"I...yes." Blake struggled. "How do you know?"

"She's on the phone." Winter replied. She picked up the phone and held it out toward Blake. "She wants to speak to you."

Blake hesitated and gulped. Then with a quick motion she snatched the phone, tapped the screen and pressed it to her ear. "H-hello?"

"Blake...is that really you?" Kali asked.

"Y-yes." Blake stammered. "I-it's me. How did you...how did you..."

"I saw your billboard, the one downtown." Kali answered. "Can I...can I see you?"

"I...where are you?" Blake asked.

"Vale University Hospital." Kali replied.

"The hospital?!" Blake gasped. "Why?"

"I kind of crashed my car when I saw the billboard." Kali admitted. "I'm a little beat up. Your father should be here soon. Will you...join us?"

"I...I'll be right there." Blake declared. She pulled the phone away from her ear and tapped it to end the call.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Winter asked. "Glynda perhaps?"

"No, I'll take Velvet and go." Blake shook her head. "She crashed her car when she saw my billboard. No wonder, she probably thought I was dead."

"What...happened with you and your parents?" Winter asked.

Blake waved her off, heading for the door. "I'll explain later."

Blake had practically dragged Velvet out of Solstice HQ and into their car with barely any details. "Parents think I'm dead, mom saw my billboard and crashed, in hospital, gotta' go, come on!" Now Blake drove like a madwoman, speeding and weaving through traffic.

Velvet held on for dear life. "Blake, please slow down!" She begged. "We don't want to join her this way."

"I'm sorry!" Blake groaned. "I'm just nervous, and...scared."

"Blake, what happened?" Velvet asked. "You only ever told me you lost contact with your parents and didn't wanna' talk about it."

"I did!" Blake exclaimed. "I didn't...look I just...I really fucked up okay. They sent me to college, they paid for everything, and I ended blowing it all on drugs, and then all that shit happened with
Adam. I figured it was better for all of us if things stayed the way they were."

"What?" Velv demanded. "You dropping off the face of the planet and staying away?"

"Yes!" Blake shouted. "I may as well have been dead, or at least dead to them. At best they'd given up, at worst they thought I was dead, mourned and moved on. When Adam died...it had been years. What good would have come from me appearing out of nowhere? Hey mom, dad. I didn't die, just turned into a pathetic drugged out whore for a gang member, all on your dime! I was better off dead than that kind of disappointment. At least this way they could think they were good parents, because they were. I was just fucked up, stupid, depressed and isolated, and it was my fault, not theirs, and I...fuck Velvs, fuck…"

Blake stopped at a red light. Her hands clenched the steering wheel, her knuckles white. She attempted to gain control of her breathing, wiping the tears from her eyes. She heard a click and Velv opened the door.

"Move over, I'm driving." Velv ordered. Blake put the car in park, undid her seatbelt and jumped over the center console into the passenger's seat. By the time Velv had taken her place and shifted into gear, the light was green. "It would be fucked up if you missed this because we got booked. Now, you need to think about what your mother and father will ask, and exactly what you're ready to tell them. If you're not sure, wait until you can talk to Glynda. If you're feeling overwhelmed, I'll step in, okay?" Blake took a deep breath, laying against the headrest with her eyes closed. She felt Velv's hand squeeze her leg. "Blake, everything is going to be okay. Okay?"

Blake nodded. "Okay."

Blake and Velv made it to the hospital at a much safer pace. After talking with a receptionist, they found themselves just outside Kali Belladonna's room. Blake took a quick peek to confirm it was indeed her mother. It was. Kali seemed engrossed in her phone. Blake stood stock still, staring at the light streaming from the room into the slightly darker hallway.

Velv wrapped her arm around Blake's waist. "It'll be okay, you can do this." She whispered in Blake's ear. "She's probably more scared than you are."

Blake silently chuckled. "I know she'll be more scared." She sighed. "That's what I'm afraid of. She was already jumpy when I was young. Then I disappeared, and she was just in a car crash."

"Blake, just take it slow, let her set the pace." Velv suggested. "I'll hang out here. If you need me, call." She pecked Blake's cheek and withdrew, giving her a light push, just enough so she would start moving forward, into the light, and into the view of her mother.

Kali noticed the movement and looked up. Her eyes bulged, her jaw dropped, and so did her phone. "Blake?" She gasped.

Blake swallowed, stepping into the room. It was empty, but for Kali in the corner. Kali reached toward her with a shaking hand, the other covering her mouth. "H-hey mum." Blake managed.

"Is it really you?" Kali asked. Blake slowly made the journey to Kali's bedside, reaching out and taking her mother's hand. Kali sobbed at the touch. "Blake, honey, it is you!"

"Yeah mum, it's me." Blake nodded. "I'm really here."

Kali continued to dissolve into tears, pulling Blake into a shuddering embrace. "I-I thought I'd lost you forever." She wept. "I thought you hated me. I thought...a-are you okay? You seem to be doing
well for yourself. I did see your billboard before I crashed. Well, it's because of it I crashed, but it's not your fault. I was just a little shocked, and almost hit a car, so I swerved a-and well...hit a...parked car. At least I didn't hurt anyone!"

Kali pulled back, keeping a grip on Blake's hands. She tried to smile reassuringly, but red ringed eyes and trembling lips betrayed her frailty. Blake took in the image of her mother properly. Kali had aged surprisingly well, considering the years since Blake last saw her, and the stresses she must have endured. Laugh lines and crow's feet had deepened, grey was seeping into the deep ebony locks of her hair, and her voice was a little less sure, though it had never been the strongest. Kali was always a shaky woman, like a stiff wind could blow her voice away, not to mention her body.

"You hurt yourself though." Blake noted. "How bad was it?"

"Oh, it wasn't too bad." Kali shook her head. "Just a broken ankle...and cracked rib...and slight concussion, and I swear I'm forgetting something, but it's probably not important. What is important is you. Where have you been? What happened? You just stopped talking to us, and when I tried to find you...you just...we thought something terrible had happened!"

Blake sighed. She noticed a chair, pulled it over, and sat down. "A lot happened...and yes, some of it was terrible." Blake cast her gaze down at the floor. "But it wasn't your fault. It was mine, so don't think for a second that any of this happened because of you, okay?" Kali bit her lip, but nodded. "I...got addicted to drugs. There's no excuse for it. I was stupid, stressed and depressed, and a...friend took me to a party and I tried some. Then I tried some more and it spiraled from there. I met this guy, this dealer, Adam, and we...we were a thing. He was very controlling, a gang member, and basically took me off the grid.

"I quit the drugs after a while, but I couldn't leave. The only reason I got away was because he died, shot in some deal gone wrong. I got free, went through some therapy, and met some very, very good people. One of them, Winter, you spoke to her on the phone, started a modeling company. I mostly do makeup, but sometimes I do the modeling myself too. We don't really have any business in Menagerie, so I guess we don't advertise there. I just never really gave it much thought."

"But you got better, you're doing okay." Kali said. "Why didn't you try to reach out?"

"I was scared." Blake sighed.

"Of what?" Kali asked.

Blake felt her eyes sting, the lump in her throat threatening to burst forth. "I...I didn't want you to be upset." Blake explained. "I didn't wanna' hurt you anymore. I didn't wanna' be a fuck up, recovering addict of a daughter. I should have been better than that mum. I should have made you proud. Going away to college, it was supposed to be a good thing, but I fucked it up. I fucked everything up, and I was better off dead than such a fuck up..." Blake broke down, clutching her mother's hand.

Kali pulled Blake into another embrace, and Blake did not resist, sobbing into her blanket as Kali ran fingers soothingly through her hair. "It's okay Little Kitten." Kali soothed. "You're past that, you're safe, you're back in my arms. It's all I ever wanted for you. I love you. I will always love you-"

A yelp, grunt, thud and some loud thumping sounds snapped them out of their emotional breakdowns. They turned toward the door to see a large man pushing himself to his feet, bending over a foot sticking past the doorway. "I am very sorry." The man apologized. "I was in a hurry a-and...are you okay?"

"I'll live...uh..." Velvet replied.
"Ghira." The man introduced himself.

"Dad?" Blake called.

Ghira straightened, pulling Velvet to her feet and snapping to look at Blake. His jaw dropped. "Blake?" He gasped. "Blake!" Blake smiled and stood. She crossed the room and jumped into her father's waiting arms. Ghira hugged her tightly, lifting her off her feet and spinning around as they laughed. "When Kali called me I thought she was seeing things. I can...I can hardly believe it...still. You've grown so much. God, look at you. You've got my height for sure, and your mother's...Kali!"

"Hey honey." Kali waved.

"What...are...I...Blake..." Ghira struggled.

"Dad, slow down, take a deep breath, sit." Blake advised. "I'm not going anywhere. Just give me a sec, okay?" Ghira nodded, trying to take deep breaths as he made his way to Kali's bedside, holding her as tenderly as possible. Blake turned to Velvet, who was peeking around the edge of the doorway. "You okay?"

"Yeah, he just kinda' stumbled into me." Velvet replied. "My ankle hurts a little but I'll be fine! How are you?"

"Getting better." Blake answered. "Can you come in? I think I'm gonna' need to change the subject in a bit."

"Of course." Velvet agreed.

Blake, with Velvet at her back, briefly explained herself to Ghira. It was less detailed than her explanation to Kali, but there would be time for elaboration later. Blake had something else she would much rather talk about. "...I was in a bad place after that, a really, really bad place...but my therapist Glynda found me, invited me to her support group, and things got better. I made new friends, I met Velvet..." Blake turned and held her hand out for Velvet, who took it, moving to stand beside her. "Mum, Dad, meet Velvet Belladonna, my wife."

"Hey." Velvet smiled and waved, blushing.

Ghira and Kali both looked surprised, though Kali's expression was one of confusion more than shock. "Hello!" Kali greeted. "I uh...didn't know Blake swung that way...and...I didn't know it was legal."

"Same sex marriage is legal in Menagerie, not to mention Mistral, Vale, Patch and most of Atlas." Ghira noted.

"Oh...uh...cool!" Kali struggled. "It's very nice to meet you Velvet."

Ghira looked lost in thought, and Kali slapped him on the arm. "Oh!" He gasped. "Right, sorry. Velvet, it is nice to meet you, and again, sorry for knocking you over. I forget my own weight sometimes."

"It's okay sir." Velvet smiled. "It's a pleasure to meet both of you."

"So, you met through therapy?" Kali asked.

"Yeah...uh...my prior partner, Coco, passed away." Velvet explained. "I took things pretty badly, but Glynda found me too. I met Blake and we hit it off. We moved in together because it was easier on
our wallets, and we just kinda' fell in love. We got married a few months ago."

"Were there...any issues?" Ghira asked.

"Uh, no?" Velvet replied, not really understanding the question. "Not really. Though...Glynda got drunk and made out with everyone. That was...interesting."

"And Sage and Scarlet spiked Sun's drink." Blake added.

"Oh, and Nora almost ate the cake!" Velvet exclaimed.

"She did eat the cake." Blake noted. "The decoy cake, which went missing…"

"And everyone is okay with you?" Ghira asked. "I don't know how attitudes towards...uh...your...kind...are here. Menagerie can be surprisingly harsh at times."

"There's not really any discrimination here." Blake shrugged. "If anyone has any issues with us, they've not voiced them."

"Thank goodness." Kali breathed a sigh of relief. "You've gone through enough as is."

"Yes...are you truly doing well?" Ghira asked. "Not anything against you Velvet, just...this is all a very big shock to us, a lot to take in."

"It's okay, I understand." Velvet waved him off. "I guess it's not everyday two daughters pop out of the blue and all…"

"Two beautiful daughters." Kali smiled. "Do you model too?"

"Sometimes." Velvet answered. "I'm mainly the photographer though. I'm a little camera shy."

"I'd love to see more of your work, both of you." Kali declared. "Maybe even this Solstice place?"

"After you heal Kali." Ghira advised. "You really should be resting."

"I'm fine Ghira, just a little bumped up." Kali assured him. "Besides, I don't wanna' sleep yet. I have two daughters to connect with. And I'm starving. And I have to pee."

"Blake?" Ghira asked.

"Mum, you were just in a car accident." Blake observed. "It would make me feel much better if you try and get a little more rest, and we can go get you some food, okay?"

"I don't want you to go yet." Kali protested. "You only just got here."

Blake sighed, smiling guiltily before walking forward to embrace Kali. "I'm not leaving, I promise." She declared. "I'm only stepping out for a little while. Gotta' make some calls to work. I'll be back. Velvet can keep you company, okay?"

"Okay, I love you." Kali relented.

"I love you too mum." Blake smiled. "Velv, can you keep mum company?"

"Sure." Velvet replied. "Can you bring back something from the vending machine?"

"Yeah." Blake nodded. "Dad?"
"Coming." Ghira confirmed. "I won't be long honey."

"Try not to knock anyone else down sweetie." Kali smirked.

"I'll try to keep him out of trouble." Blake joked. She hugged Velvet, then left the room with Ghira.

"So...uh...I hope you don't mind me asking…” Kali struggled. "I'm just a little curious about...maybe...grandchildren?" Velvet chuckled.
Blake and Ghira walked until they found a deserted corridor. Blake stopped, looking up and down, listening for others. "Blake?" Ghira asked.

"It's okay dad." Blake said. "No one's here. You don't have to hold back anymore." Ghira stared down at his daughter, a hesitant look on his face. "I'm sorry dad, please."

Ghira sighed and pulled Blake into his arms. Blake tensed. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I was stressed and irritable, and I took it out on you, and I never wanted to drive you away-"

"It's not your fault dad!" Blake protested. "It's mine! I was stupid and-"

"And you were young, and we all do stupid things at that age, and it hits some harder than others."
Ghira interrupted. "I don't blame you for leaving."

"And I don't blame you for it either!" Blake cut him off. "I always wanted to travel, and I took the first opportunity that came up, and you didn't have to let me go, but you did. You didn't have to give me space, but you did, because you cared for me, even though it hurt mum, and I fucked up. It's my fault, not yours, and I accept that. You need to as well, please."

"I don't know if I can do that Blake."

Blake and Ghira held each other for a time, nothing but the occasional sniffle coming from Blake to break the silence. Finally she pulled away. Ghira let her go, and they both sat, leaning against the wall. "What happened?" Blake asked. "When did you find out?"

"You hadn't been talking to us often at that point, so when two weeks went by...well your mother was worried but we figured you were either busy or it had slipped your mind." Ghira explained. "But when we called you, your phone was disconnected, completely. Your bank account was closed and emptied. The school said you had been absent from lectures for several weeks. We even called a few of your friends, but they hadn't seen you either."

"I've moved in with Adam."

"Please dad." Blake resisted. "It's hard enough with Glynda. Not now."

"Did he-" Ghira persisted.

"Yes, now please, drop it." Blake groaned. Ghira clenched his fists, growling. Blake laid a hand over his. "He's dead, and fucking buried, or cremated, or whatever the hell they did. Got shot in the back by his own gang. Good riddance to demonic filth."
Ghira wrapped his arm around Blake, who snuggled closer, clutching at Ghira's sweater as she shook. "We prayed for you." He sighed. "I was never much for the faith, but Kali built a shrine. It was her way of coping. I joined her when I could. Whether your spirit lived on here, or with the Maidens, we hoped it would count for something."

"I didn't deserve your prayers." Blake declared. "I don't deserve anything, not you, not Velvet, Glynda and Solstice."

"Blake-" Ghira tried to protest.

"I don't deserve the Maidens' kindness." Blake continued. "I should be in whatever hell Adam fell to. I'm filthy. I loved him. I watched a poor girl beaten within an inch of her life and I did nothing to stop it...too damn scared and cowardly."

"There's nothing wrong with survival Blake." Ghira countered. "I doubt there was anything you could have done. What matters is you got out of there. You're alive. You survived that hell and bettered yourself. You forged a new life. My only wish is that you'd come back to us sooner. Yes, you made mistakes, I made more than my fair share in my youth, were it not for your mother, I doubt either of us would be here. More than anything, I'm glad that we can be here, after everything we've been through that we can be a family again...a slightly bigger family than before. But hey, more family is good. At least I won't have to worry about you getting pregnant."

Blake slapped Ghira's chest as they both laughed. "Don't let mum hear you say that." Blake warned. "She was always the one talking about finding me a nice boy someday."

"It'll be our secret." Ghira smiled.

"Don't get too far ahead of yourself either." Blake advised. "We're planning to adopt. We were visiting orphanages just a few weeks ago."

"Oh, well, uh, how did that go?" Ghira asked.

"Pretty well." Blake shrugged. "At least until we stumbled upon the secret child of my best friend's late sister."

"What?" Ghira gasped.

"We almost adopted her, but in the end Yang decided she could handle it." Blake sighed. "Poor woman. Summer is such a sweet girl, and she's almost the spitting image of Ruby."

"Well…" Ghira trailed off.

"Oh, and our other friends Nora and Pyrrha wanted a baby." Blake added. "Or rather, Nora wanted a baby and Pyrrha agreed."

"Fair." Ghira nodded.

"But Nora wanted to do it the old fashioned way, and her best friend Sun to do it." Blake went on. "Eventually they all decide to give a three way relationship a shot."

"Odd, but not unheard of." Ghira allowed.
"They do the do, a month passes, and everyone gets called in a panic because it turns out they're both pregnant." Blake rolled her eyes.

"Well...whoops." Ghira laughed uneasily.

"After everyone calmed down, Pyrrha decided to keep the baby." Blake explained. "But she's been really panicky and Nora was just being weird."

"Weird?" Ghira asked.

"She...kinda' returned to normal, and I can't put enough air quotes around 'normal' so I won't even try." Blake laughed. "She's always been a little touched, not in a bad way, just imagine a hamster with a sugar high in human form. That's Nora."

"I'll need a second." Ghira shook his head. "Okay, that's weird."

"Now imagine the hamster gets pregnant, and suddenly becomes calm and well adjusted." Blake continued.

"I can see why that would be concerning." Ghira agreed.

"You know you've lost it when you walk into work thinking, 'I wish Nora would lounge around topless, eating a box of donuts.'" Blake chuckled. Ghira burst into laughter. It was the first time Blake had heard him laugh in seven years, and in the moment, she could think of no more beautiful sound.

After the heart-to-heart with her father, Blake called up Winter to notify her that she would be absent from work for a few days at least. Afterwards, she found herself receiving messages from all her friends, asking how things went, if she needed anything brought to her, if they could come visit sometime. Yang and Winter especially expressed interest, asking for a picture of them together.

"Oh my God your mum is adorable!" Yang texted. "And your dad is huge! And kinda' hot..."

"Yang, seriously -_-" Blake replied.

"Hell yeah seriously ;)" Yang responded.

Blake shook her head, scoffing. "What?" Ghira asked.

"Just Yang being Yang." Blake chuckled.

"What did she say?" Kali asked.

Blake sighed. "That you're adorable and dad's hot." She shook her head.

"Well she's not wrong." Kali and Ghira said in unison. They looked at one another, Kali giggling as Ghira grinned.

Blake rolled her eyes before glancing at the next text. "She'd like to drop by tomorrow." She announced. "Winter too. If you're up for it."

"Of course!" Kali cheered. "I never really got to meet any of your friends when you were young."

"You met Ilia." Blake noted.
"You did?" Ghira asked.

"Once!" Kali complained.

"Once was more than enough." Blake grumbled.

"Why?" Kali inquired. "She seemed so nice!"

"Yeah, she seemed nice." Blake sighed. "Until it turned out I was just a phase, and she refused to even look at me in case her embarrassing little secret got found out."

"What?" Kali asked. "Phase? How...oh! That little bitch!" Velvet chose that moment to return to the room, several candy bars in hand. She froze, but Kali's furious glare softened. "Oh, not you Velvet dear. I just found out about Ilia."

"Oh, that bitch." Velvet chuckled.

"Guys." Blake admonished.

"I had wondered why you stopped spending time with her." Ghira thought aloud.

"I was friends with her mother." Kali declared. "I should-"

"Do nothing!" Blake cut her off. "I looked her up online. She came out of the closet a few years ago, made a big post about it, apologized."

"Oh...well...good." Kali said.

There was a beat of silence. For Velvet it was too much. "Candy anyone?"

Blake was awoken the next morning by her phone's ringtone. The blaring techno mix indicated it was Yang who had decided to disturb her slumber. Groaning, she reached for her purse, fumbling blindly beside the chair, hoping to mute the damn device before it woke her mother. Suddenly the music stopped.

"Hey Yang." Velvet answered the call. "Good. Blake's just waking up still. No, we've been awake for a while. It's okay. Here, Blake, honey?"

Blake held out her hand blindly and felt the device slipped into it. She moved it to her ear. "Blurgh." She managed.

"Sorry Blakey!" Yang apologized. "We thought you'd be awake by now."

"S'fine." Blake yawned.

"You think we could come visit now?" Yang asked.

"Bring coffee, and donuts." Blake requested.
"Oh!" Kali exclaimed. "Could I get a cookie? I love the white chocolate macadamia ones."

"I'm writing that down!" Yang announced.

"Step on it." Blake ordered. She hung up, burying her face back into the pillow with a groan. She felt gentle fingers brush through her hair.

"Still not a morning person kitten?" Kali teased.

"Nmng." Blake grumbled.

"In colder months I have to bribe her with coffee and scratches." Velvet noted.

"Oh, you mean these scratches?" Kali asked. She began scratching from the base of Blake's skull downward. Blake groaned, nuzzling the pillow.

"And the base of her spine." Velvet added.

"She stopped letting me scratch there when she got older." Kali smiled.

"Oh, I can't imagine why." Velvet smirked.

"I know right?" Blake chuckled.

"No one's stopping you." Velvet declared.

"Nmng." Blake grumbled.

Kali gave one last, languid scratch down Blake's neck, then ceased. "Go on honey." Kali encouraged. "There'll be more when you get back." Blake flushed, giving Kali a grateful look before rushing out of the room. "She didn't need to pee, did she?" Kali asked once Blake was gone.

Velvet giggled. "I may have ruined head scratches for you."

After Blake returned from the bathroom, and thwapped Velvet in the face with her pillow, the trio settled down and waited. It was not much longer before the pattering of little shoes steadily grew louder down the hall. "Aunty Velvet!" Summer exclaimed. She skidded around the doorway and made a beeline for Velvet, jumping into her waiting arms.

"Hey baby girl." Velvet smiled. "You're getting faster every day."

Blake chose the moment to scoop up Summer, having snuck around the bed while she was distracted. Summer squealed and giggled. "This little ball of cute is Summer." Blake introduced.

"Aunty Blake!" Summer laughed.

"Oh, she's adorable!" Kali cheered.

Summer kicked playfully before Blake lifted her onto the bed. "Summer, meet my mummy, Kali." Blake said.

"Hey there!" Kali greeted.

"Hi grandma Kali!" Summer said.
"Aw, I always wanted to be a grandma." Kali declared. Summer reached out for a hug and Kali obliged, wincing a little at the pressure on her ribs.

"Careful, she ate three cookies in the car, on top of a pancake breakfast." Winter warned, standing in the doorway.

"Oh hello!" Kali called.

"Good morning Mrs. Belladonna." Winter bowed politely. "Winter Schnee. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Kali." She responded. "Thank you Winter. I realize it must have been a little strange, getting that sort of call out of the blue."

"I certainly get some strange calls, but I'm glad to have helped." Winter smiled.

"Yang, you okay?" Blake asked.

"Hmm?" Yang had been staring off into space but snapped her gaze to Blake. "Oh, I'm fine. Hey Kali, I'm Yang Xiao-Long."

"Oh my God, your hair is amazing!" Kali praised. "What do you use?"

"A whole bunch of stuff." Yang replied. "I'll write you a list."

"Everyone you know is so beautiful." Kali chuckled. "I keep forgetting you work for a modeling agency."

"Funny, I remember someone else saying the same thing." Blake smirked.

"Well it's true." Winter noted.

Yang leaned against the window, rubbing her bare arms. "So, what do you do for a living?" She asked.

"I teach at a preschool in Porto Menagerie." Kali answered. "My husband Ghira is the mayor. He's out meeting...I don't know. I'm terrible at remembering political and business stuff, but he'll be back when he's done."

"So I gotta' know-" Yang started.

"Yang!" Blake and Winter simultaneously admonished.

"Softest!" Kali declared. "He takes great pride in it, but his products don't work on my hair. I have no idea why."

"Ugh, I know." Yang groaned. "Men's hair products make no sense. I used my dad's shampoo once when I was out, and my hair felt horrible for like a week."

"Are you cold?" Kali asked, noticing how Yang continued to rub her arms, which were crossed tightly in front of her.

Yang stopped rubbing her arms, flashing a nervous grin before looking down. "Haven't been in a hospital for years." She explained. "Not much of a fan really."
"I don't like it here either." Kali offered an understanding smile. "Ghira was awfully rowdy when we were young. Political activism is far from the safest profession. Then there were the assassination attempts…"

"What?!" Blake gasped.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding." Kali chuckled.

"The smell is the worst part to be honest." Yang complained. "The noise comes second. Antiseptic and constant beeping, and it's always the same beeping no matter where you go. I basically lived here for a year. It's weird to be back."

"Were you sick?" Kali asked.

"Nah, my sister, Summer's mother, cancer." Yang corrected.

"Oh, that poor girl." Kali sighed.

"She's in a better place now." Yang smiled sadly.

"Mummy's with the Maidens." Summer said.

"Oh sweetie, come here." Kali hugged Summer once more.

Yang perked up. "Her family's growing fast." She observed.

"Borderline crawling from the woodwork." Winter joked.

"Got any secret relatives I don't know about Velvs?" Blake asked.

"Just bigoted ones, hence the lack of holiday cards." Velvet replied.

"Why can't people just live and let live?" Kali complained.

"Because tradition and ignorance." Velvet answered. "Doesn't matter. My new family is lovely."

"And successful." Kali added. "I never would have guessed you'd become a model Blake."

"Neither would I." Blake agreed. "I was a librarian before Winter approached me. I did our friend Pyrrha's makeup one time and it impressed her."

"You did, and continue to do a wonderful job." Winter praised. "Blake and Velvet are more than employees Kali, they're major shareholders in Solstice, co-founders and very valued friends."

"We're not really that big a deal Win…" Blake protested.

"She's paying you compliments Blake, don't be bashful," Kali said. "Thank you Winter, both for your work with Blake and for visiting. I imagine you are a very busy woman, but I would love to visit Solstice someday."

"You are more than welcome to drop by Kali," Winter offered. "With the recent pregnancies, and Summer's adoption, we are fairly quiet...is Summer asleep?" Sure enough, the small girl was napping on Kali's chest.

"She burned through that energy quick." Yang whispered.
"Or she's storing it for later." Kali suggested. Yang groaned at the thought.

At times Summer could be a bundle of energy. When she was not drawing or snapping together building blocks with Yang, she would often run around the house, aimless and with reckless abandon. Yang was always worried she would slip and slam into the unforgiving furniture, but Summer was sure-footed. Yang and Winter usually suggested she go run around outside, just in case, but Summer preferred the indoors. The end result of Summer's racing about was usually exhaustion and a nap.

Summer ran around the lounge, weaving around the furniture as Yang sat on the couch, watching the little whirlwind speed past her. Though Yang was concerned for her safety, it was incredibly cute and she could not help but smile. It was so cute in fact that Yang decided to record it. She reached into her pocket, intending to grab her phone, but it was not there. Yang thought for a moment. Damn. She had left it in the car after taking Summer out to lunch. Hoping she would not miss the opportunity, Yang rushed outside, grabbed her phone, and ran back to the house. Yang could hear Summer's giggling as she pushed the front door in.

**Wham!**

The giggling stopped as Summer smashed into the opening door at a full sprint, bounced off and crashed into the side of the couch. Yang froze, staring at Summer's tiny form as she lie twisted up on the floor. A sinking feeling overtook Yang's insides. Any second she expected Summer to cry, to scream in pain. Surely the impact had injured her. Yang had hurt her. How could she have hurt her? What would she say? What would she do?

Still a bit wobbly, Summer stood up. She looked at Yang and smiled, then set off running again, resuming her giggling as she went. Yang stood at the door, trembling and on the edge of tears. Running around like that was too dangerous. They had gotten away with it this time, but next time they would not be so lucky. Yang had to do something to protect Summer, something to make her safe. She could cover all the furniture in padding, but that would leave the walls and floor, still very capable of injuring the little girl. A helmet, knee and elbow pads would still be insufficient to fully protect her. Then Yang had an idea.

Winter arrived home after a longer than expected day at Solstice. Without Blake and Velvet, everything took longer than usual. Winter was not going to rush them. They had just found new family and she would not rob them of a moment of that. Still, she wished they would return sooner than later. Everything ran so much more smoothly when they were around. Winter opened the door to find Yang lounging on the couch, watching television. Curiously, Summer was nowhere to be seen, though Winter could hear a faint giggling.

"Hey Win." Yang greeted. "Rough day?"

"You could say that." Winter confirmed. "Where's Summer?"

"Rolling around." Yang replied.

"Uh…” Winter was about to ask for more details when Summer literally rolled out of her room. She was wrapped in several layers of bubblewrap from shoulder to ankle. Her giggling was accompanied by a cacophony of pops. "Why is-

"We had a little accident with a door." Yang explained. "I decided we needed some safety measures, just in case."
"But she can't even run." Winter noted. "Wait, where did you even get that much bubblewrap?"
"Nora had it." Yang replied.

"That's...I'm not even surprised." Winter sighed. She watched as Summer rolled around the living room, giggling and popping as she went, a toothy grin on her face. "Well, at least she's having fun." Winter shook her head. "But we're going to have a long talk about your sanity."
After Yang and Winter had departed, Kali had resumed her questioning. She asked Blake about the intervening years, recent events, and Summer. Though she had only spent a short time with the couple, Summer had left a lasting impression, and truly put to rest any doubts they may have had about adoption. Kali too was excited about the prospect, even moreso after having met the girl. Naturally she asked when Blake and Velvet would resume their search.

"When everything settles down." Blake answered. "The Summer situation put it on hold, then this happened." She gestured to her parents.

After a day of meetings, Ghira had returned. He snuck in some of Kali's favorite candy as an apology for being away for so long. "When do the doctors say you can leave Kali?" He asked.

"Oh, a few days," Kali replied. "They just want to make sure I'm of sound mind."

"Sound mind?" Blake raised a curious eyebrow.

"Well...I was a little hysterical after the crash." Kali admitted. "Just a tad."

"A little?" Ghira pressed.

"Incy, wincy, little bit." Kali nodded.

"Mum, I've seen your reaction to spiders." Blake noted.

"Oh alright." Kali huffed. "Fine. I was maybe freaking out because my missing daughter was back from the dead and on a billboard, and I had a concussion and my ribs hurt and my ankle hurt and I think I peed myself a little. I can't remember...I hope no one had to clean me up..."

"Kali, calm." Ghira urged. "It's okay." He gripped her hand as she took deep breaths, slowly regaining her composure.

"Mum, you need anything?" Blake asked.

"A drink." Kali replied. "Something that isn't just water, please."

"Want a snack too?" Blake asked.

"Thank you dear." Kali nodded.

"Dad?" Velvet asked.

"Wha-uh, sure." Ghira struggled. "Just some chips, thanks." Blake and Velvet departed. Ghira remained silent for a time. "Well, I'm dad now."

"How does it feel?" Kali asked.

"A little strange, but I'm sure I'll get used to it." Ghira answered. "She is a lovely girl."

"I couldn't ask for a better daughter in law." Kali smiled.
"I can't wrap my head around the accent though." Ghira shook his head.

"I think it's cute." Kali chuckled.

"But where is it from?" Ghira asked.

"Vacuo, isn't it?" Kali suggested.

"Hmm... I don't think I've met anyone from Vacuo before." Ghira thought aloud.

"Well there we go." Kali said.

"Found you!" A woman exclaimed. Turning to the door, Kali and Ghira saw a ginger peaking around the frame, grinning as she slipped into the room. "Hiya, I'm Nora. Yang told me your room number 'cuz we were coming in for a checkup, 'cuz Pyrrha's still a bit paranoid. So I figured I'd come say hi! Where are Blake and Velvs?"

"Fetching some snacks." Kali replied. "It's lovely to meet you Nora. Blake has told some interesting stories."

Nora skipped over to an empty chair. "Oh, oh!" She exclaimed. "Did she tell you about the beach episode?"

"Someone had an episode on the beach?" Ghira asked.

"Yes!" Nora cheered. "Well, no, not literally. Sorta'. Pyrrha and Winter had this big volleyball fight, and they were all angry and really into it, so I stole Win's bottoms and she had the cutest little bush. It was awesome!"

Kali and Ghira exchanged a look before the latter shrugged. "That sounds... like fun!" Kali managed, not really knowing how to react. She gestured toward Nora's bulging belly. "How far along are you?"

"Uh, about four months or so now." Nora answered. "Side effects are really sinking in. I can't do all my exercises, and my boobs are swelling and they really ache sometimes. I mean, seriously, look how big my nipples are. It's weird!" She suddenly pulled up her shirt, revealing her bare breasts. Ghira and Kali's eyes bulged, Ghira quickly blocking his vision with his hand.

Kali stared transfixed, tilting her head. "Are those... hearts? " She asked.

"Yep!" Nora confirmed. "I got 'em when Yang had her tattoos finished. The artist was so cute! I highly recommend them."

A tall redhead appeared in the doorway and groaned. "Nora!" She admonished. "Put your shirt down! You forgot your bra. I'm terribly sorry, Nora is a free spirit."

"I wasn't very free last night when you cuf- " Nora started, cut off as the redhead clamped her hand over Nora's mouth.

"I'm Pyrrha." The redhead introduced herself. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Ghira." He said.

"Kali." She said. "Where is your partner... third partner... boyfriend?"

"He's teaching kids to be monkeys!" Nora laughed.
"Sun hosts parkour classes several days a week." Pyrrha explained. "Mostly for children and teens."

"When he isn't waiting on these two hand and foot." Blake joked, appearing in the doorway, closely followed by Velvet. "Hey Pyrrha, Nora."

"Hey Blake, hey Velv-ooh, chips!" Nora exclaimed.

"Hey guys, how'd the exam go?" Velvet asked.

"Very well." Pyrrha replied. "Nora and I are in perfect health. I still feel a bit on the small side, but the doctor assures me nothing is wrong."

"Maybe Nora stole some size from you." Velvet joked. Everyone glanced back and forth between Pyrrha and Nora's bellies. Nora's was the size of a basketball, but Pyrrha looked more like she had eaten a very large meal.

"I wouldn't even be surprised." Pyrrha sighed.

"Don't let it worry you." Kali encouraged. "Blake was on the small side, even at eight months. Now look at her. She's got Ghira's height for sure."

"And your rear." Ghira smirked.

"You mean there's a second Bellabooty!?" Nora gasped.

"It's not that great." Kali demurred.

"Oh, pfft." Nora waved her off. "When you get outta' bed I'm gonna' see for myself."

"I'm not sure if that's encouraging or discouraging." Blake grinned.

"Depends on if you enjoy groping." Blake grinned.

Kali paused for a moment. "Well, I enjoy your father groping me." She declared.

"Kali-" Ghira started.

"Those big hands are perfect for it!" Nora cheered. Ghira looked down at his hands.

"Nora, you need to get some rest." A tall, older blonde woman appeared in the doorway.

"Aw, but I napped in the car." Nora complained.

"You stayed up all night watching police show reruns." Pyrrha noted.

"Worth it!" Nora declared.

"Oh, come on Nora, we can pick up some lunch on the way." Pyrrha suggested.

"Oh fine." Nora relented. "Seeya' round, Mama and Papa Belladonna."

"It was a pleasure to meet you." Pyrrha bowed politely.

"Likewise." Kali smiled.

As Blake and Velvet bid Nora and Pyrrha farewell, the older blonde stepped closer to Kali's bed. "Glynda Goodwitch, it's a pleasure to finally meet you." She introduced herself. She shook Kali and
Ghira's hands.

"The pleasure is ours Ms. Goodwitch." Ghira greeted. "Please, call me Ghira."

"Kali, please." She requested.

"Then I suppose it would only be fair for you to call me Glynda." She noted. "I apologize for not visiting sooner. With Pyrrha's pregnancy, I've taken on her caseload in addition to my own. How are you faring?"

"Very well thank you." Kali replied. "I should be released soon-ish."

Glynda opened her mouth to speak, but a chirpy tone rang out first. She smiled apologetically and fumbled with her purse, finally extracting her phone. Looking concerned, she turned away to answer. "Penny, are you...Penny, I need you to remain calm." Glynda insisted. "Deep breaths, like we practiced. Now, where is your father?" She paused and nodded. "Just remember, he'll be back soon. Why don't you put on a video? Make the time pass more quickly." Another pause. "Good idea. See, you'll be fine. Just a second." Glynda covered the phone with her hand. "I apologize, but I must attend to this. Please take care." She immediately headed for the exit, raising the phone to her ear again. "Alright, I'm back…"

"Superwitch, off to save the day again." Velvet joked. Blake could not help but laugh.

Raven was bored. Glynda was at work, and would be until late in the evening. Her covering Pyrrha's patients meant she often worked fourteen hour days. Raven did not even have her job to occupy her, having the day off. Solstice did not need her either. After a few vague, failing attempts at playing video games, she decided she had to go out. She would drop in and visit Yang, always a good time. Getting to spend time with her new...granddaughter...would be a nice little bonus. 

Granddaughter...she was never going to get used to that.

Raven slid her convertible to a stop in front of the Schnee/Xiao-Long house. She hopped out, strode to the door and knocked. There was some light noise from within, then the door opened, revealing Yang. "Hey mom, what's up?" Yang asked.

"I just figured I'd drop by and visit the kids." Raven replied.

"You're bored aren't you?" Yang accused.

"You have no idea." Raven admitted. "Out of booze too. Glynda sucks at keeping the place stocked."

"Come in." Yang waved. "You know, you can buy your own liquor."

"I prefer to mooch." Raven chuckled. "So, what are you two doing?"

"We were just putting together some building block kits." Yang answered. She gestured toward the kitchen table. Summer sat there, a collection of brightly colored plastic blocks spread out around her, grouped by shape, size and color.

"Can I join you?" Raven asked.

"Sure!" Summer cheered.

Raven followed Yang over, sitting between she and Summer. "So, what are we building?"
"A police station." Summer replied. "All we need is the firehouse and our city will be done!"

"I may have gone a little overboard with my purchases." Yang observed. "I just love these kits."

"Alright, what next?" Raven asked. She glanced at the directions, then picked up a block and reached for the partially constructed building.

"No Grandma Rave, not that piece!" Summer warned. "This one!" Summer reached out with another piece. It looked identical.

"Uh...what's the difference?" Raven asked.

"You can't see it?" Summer asked. "The color is different."

"It is?" Raven looked more closely at the blocks. She could still not tell the difference.

"Mom, are you colorblind?" Yang asked.

"I don't...maybe a little?" Raven shrugged. "I can usually see color alright, it's just so hard to tell the difference between those two."

"Maybe it's because you're getting old." Yang joked.

"First I get called grandma, now you call me old." Raven groaned. "Made a great choice coming here."

"Oh come on, I'm just teasing." Yang scoffed.

"What's wrong with being old?" Summer asked. "I can't wait to be older."

Raven grabbed both sides of Summer's face and held it close to her own. "Don't say that, don't ever say that."

"Mom, you're scaring her." Yang admonished.

"Your breath smells like medicine." Summer observed.

"Your vision isn't bad because you're old, it's bad because you're a drunk." Yang noted. "Maybe you'll be able to see if you lay off the sauce."

"Oh...let your mom have her fun." Raven waved her off.

"I'm not giving you any of my liver, so you'd better take care of the one you've got." Yang warned.

Raven rolled her eyes and turned her attention back to the build in progress. "So, what's next?"

"I have an idea!" Summer announced. "Since you're having trouble with colors, you can build the police car! It's all black and white."

"I guess that works." Raven shrugged.

"You could probably handle putting the figures together too." Yang added. "They all have the same bodies and legs, just different faces, hair and hats."

"Yeah, let me handle the simple stuff." Raven nodded. "I'll leave the hard work to the young and sober."
Yang laughed. "Yeah, sober, right."

Winter was home alone with Summer. Yang had to pose for a shoot, and given that Nora would also be present, Winter decided it was better to keep Summer at home. Winter did not need another discussion of Nora's heart nipples. Still, being alone with Summer was not a particularly comfortable situation for Winter. She had never seen herself as in any way motherly. Luckily Summer was low maintenance. Summer happily colored as cartoons played on the television. Winter found the cartoons rather entertaining. She had never been allowed to watch such programs as a child, her father considering them moronic.

The doorbell rang. Winter got up and walked to the door, opening it to reveal a lanky older man with black hair. "Yes?" She asked.

"Ah, you must be Winter." The man said. Winter noticed he smelled of alcohol. "A little more scowly and less bikini though." Winter slammed the door shut. "I'm Yang's uncle, Qrow!" The man shouted through the door.

Winter heaved a heavy sigh and slumped. "Summer dear, cover your ears." Winter commanded. Summer did so. "Fuck!" Winter shouted at the top of her lungs.

"I heard that." Summer giggled.

With another sigh, Winter opened the door again. "Seriously though, you look great in a bikini." Qrow observed.

Winter slammed the door even harder.

Yang pulled up on her motorcycle about an hour later to find her uncle standing beside the front door of the house, his travel bag on the ground beside him. "Hey Qrow, good to see ya'." Yang greeted him. "What are you doing standing outside? You didn't have to wait for me."

"Your girlfriend won't let me in." Qrow replied.

"Congrats." Qrow smirked. "She slammed the door in my face."

"I can only assume it's your fault." Yang accused.

"Well...maybe." Qrow shrugged.

Yang chuckled and knocked on the door. "Go away!" Winter shouted from inside.

"Win, Qrow says he's sorry!" Yang responded.

"No he doesn't." Qrow grumbled.

Winter opened the door. "No he doesn't." She scowled.

Summer ran up behind Winter. "Mummy, Winter said 'fuck!'" She announced.

"Did she now?" Yang grinned.

Winter groaned. "You're in trouble." Qrow taunted.
"I have many knives." Winter threatened.

"And she's shockingly good with them." Yang purred.

Winter shivered. "Do not speak like that around your drunkle." She admonished. Finally she stepped aside and allowed Qrow to enter.

"Drunkle?" Summer asked, tilting her head.

"Hi Drunkle Qrow!" Summer giggled.

"Hey kiddo, you look jus' like your grandmother." Qrow noted.

"Thanks!" Summer cheered.

"Grandmother?" Winter asked.

"Well yeah, kinda'." Qrow confirmed. "Ruby got Tai's eye shape."

"I guess the Rose genes like Mistrali." Yang joked.

"Should we be worried about Pyrrha?" Winter smirked.

"I wouldn't mind having her as a daughter." Yang chuckled.

"But the age difference." Winter countered.

"Eh, at least she won't get pregnant." Yang shrugged. "Summer can do whatever she wants, as long as cancer and pregnancy aren't involved."

"I can't believe you still have this table." Qrow shook his head. Yang and Summer sat on either side, Winter across from him, eating the dinner Yang had cooked. "I figured you'd want to make a clean break."

"Ask Winter, she's the weirdo who wanted it." Yang explained. "I'd have torched the place if I could."

"It's got character." Winter declared. "When I bought this place it was so sterile, and this table really helped make it feel more like home."

"I think it's funny!" Summer cheered.

"Oh, it's funny kiddo, that's for sure." Qrow smiled. "Goes well with the funny family we've got."

"So, where have you been?" Yang asked. "I haven't seen you in years."

"I was on Patch, getting my business going." Qrow replied.

"Business?" Winter asked.

"Leatherworking." Qrow nodded. "I'd love it if you modeled some of my stuff."

"Qrow, stop hitting on my fiance." Yang warned. "I will punch you."
"And as I can attest, she punches hard." Winter added.

"Anyway, I haven't been to Vale since I visited your shitty apartment." Qrow continued. "Too busy."

"Watch your language." Winter admonished.

"Oh, right, sorry kiddo." Qrow apologized.

"We visited Patch a few times." Yang noted. "We could have stopped by if you told us where you were living."

"Yeah, well, I guess I was a little embarrassed." Qrow sighed. "I poured every cent I had into my business, so I was living in an apartment as shi...as run down as yours was. I finally got myself a decent place though. It's a little small, but it's clean, and there are no holes in the walls."

"We could have helped you out." Yang suggested. "Winter is terrifyingly rich. Heck, we could still help out if you need it."

"Nah, I'm not gonna' mooch." Qrow refused.

"If only Raven had the same outlook." Winter rolled her eyes. "She drinks more of our liquor than we do."

"I think she just uses it as an excuse to see her daughter." Qrow suggested. "Course she'd never admit that."

"It's nice to have her over every once in a while." Yang smiled. "I wish you'd visit more often though. How long are you planning to stay?"

"Just a few days." Qrow replied. "Then it's back to Patch and back to work."

"You've gotten awfully responsible." Yang teased. "What happened to the wild parties and sleeping all day?"

"I guess I finally grew up." Qrow smirked.

"Growing up is overrated." Yang declared.

"Having some money isn't bad though." Qrow countered.

"Ain't that the truth?" Yang chuckled. "So, where are you staying while you're in Vale? Dive hotel? Apartment above a bar? Brothel?"

"I was actually hoping I could just crash here." Qrow replied. "All fun ideas though."

"Well, Summer has what used to be the guest room, so we don't really have a place for you." Winter warned.

"I don't need a room." Qrow shrugged. "I'm more than happy to crash on the couch."

"Sounds good." Yang agreed. "I'll get you a pillow and blanket."

"I don't think your gal-pal is down with the plan." Qrow observed. Winter did indeed look displeased.
"Come on Win, Qrow's been really good to me." Yang beseeched. "He helped me when I was in a really bad place. He's sort of the reason we met."

"Alright." Winter relented. "But I've got some ground rules. No smoking, you are to be fully clothed unless behind a locked bathroom door, no swearing, and no hitting on me."

"Well I don't smoke and I have no problem wearing clothes." Qrow noted. "I could probably get the language under control too. Not hitting on you is gonna' be a rough one though."

"Just think, if you do, I'll beat you up." Yang threatened. "Then Winter will stomp on your manhood."

"Hmm...might enjoy that last bit." Qrow joked. Yang and Winter were not amused. "Fine, I'll be good."
"Which character should I be?" Summer asked, sitting in Qrow's lap. The video game controller seemed comically oversized in her hands.

"Hmm...how about this one?" Qrow pointed her in the direction of a fluffy pink blob. They would be fighting as a team against Yang and Winter. It was the same game in which Winter's victories had so raised Nora's ire all those years ago.

"Okay, but I don't really like pink." Summer complained.

"If you push that button you can change the color." Qrow explained, giving the button a press himself to demonstrate.

Summer finally settled on a red version of the smiling blob. Yang selected a boxer and Winter a regal swordsman. Qrow picked a slender character that specialized in teleporting and counters. "You're going down old man!" Yang boasted.

"I think my partner and I have the measure of you two." Qrow smirked.

"What do the buttons do?" Summer asked. Winter and Yang sniggered. It would pretty much be two on one. Easy.

Qrow held his controller in front of Summer, pointing to the buttons as he went. "Light attacks, special attacks, jump, dodge." He instructed. "Just try to keep your character on the level."

"I'll try." Summer nodded.

After a brief delay the level loaded up. The one Qrow had selected was large, with many obstructions and places a character could hide. "Why don't we let Summer hang out over to the side, let her get her bearings." He suggested.

"She has until we beat you to figure it out." Yang taunted.

"Don't worry kiddo, I'll beat both your mommies all by myself if I have to." Qrow encouraged Summer.

While Summer tried out the various buttons off to the side, her character bobbing up and down, making adorable high-pitched squeaks, Qrow charged straight for Yang and Winter. Winter swiped at him with a sword. Teleport, miss. He appeared behind her character, grabbed it, and tossed it into Yang's, knocking both down. He rushed in and landed a few blows before they could recover, then leapt back. Yang charged, launching a powerful punch. Counter. The attack was reflected back into Yang and her character went sailing past the edge of the ground. Teleport. Qrow's character appeared above Yang's, and with a downward kick, sent it screaming into the abyss below. One life down, two to go.

As Yang respawned, Winter attacked, attempting to prevent Qrow's character from returning to the safety of the ground. Teleport, miss. Now behind Winter's character, Qrow's kicked hers off the edge. Teleport, downward kick. One life down, two to go. All the while Summer's character happily bounced around in the corner, occasionally eliciting giggles from the girl. There was a flurry as Winter and Yang attacked Qrow at the same time. It had the same result, and though they had landed
a few blows, each lost a life, down to their last.

Winter and Yang managed to finish off the wounded Qrow, but that only took away his first of three lives, and left them as beat up as he had been. Moments after respawning, he eliminated Winter from the game. Then, he teleported and leapt his way over to Summer's character. He bent down and whispered something in her ear. She smiled and nodded. Yang rushed her character over. She did not want to hit Summer's, but she was not going to let Qrow just use her as a shield. She attacked Qrow and he stood there at the edge. With one powerful punch, he went sailing off the level and too his doom.

"One on one now!" Yang cheered. Summer's character waddled up behind her. "Huh?" Summer's character opened its mouth, sucking Yang's character into its gaping maw. "Oh crap." Summer directed her character off the edge. It fell, taking Yang's with it, both falling to their deaths.

"You did it Summer, you won." Qrow chuckled, hugging the little girl nestled in his lap.

"I did it!" She exclaimed.

"Wow, you're here for like a day and you're already teaching her to troll." Yang huffed.

"If she's having fun, how can you complain?" Qrow shrugged.

"I guess." Yang sighed. "How are you so good at this game?"

"Are you cheating?" Winter accused. "I'm a master at this, just ask Nora."

"For those years in my awful apartment, I had three possessions that had nothing to do with work." Qrow explained. "One was my bed, one was a television, and the last was a video game console with this game. I didn't have cable or anything, so if I wanted to have fun, this was basically it."

"You need more hobbies." Yang noted. "Drinking, sleeping around and playing one five year old video game isn't great."

"The first two are pretty great." Qrow grinned.

"Alright, rematch." Winter declared. "Your win was a fluke. We're taking you down."

"We've got 'em, right Sum?" Qrow asked.

"Yeah!" Summer giggled. Qrow's victory had not been a fluke. No matter what Yang and Winter tried, no matter what characters they played or which Qrow chose, no matter the level, Qrow always won.

Ghira pulled up in front of Solstice Modeling headquarters, Kali in the passenger's seat beside him. The building was simple yet elegant, with beige rendered walls illuminated by floodlights which shone from behind the neat hedge that ringed the studio. Solstice was emblazoned high up, in a curvy but legible font, the logo cut from brushed steel and anchored into the concrete above the entrance. Ghira could not help but be impressed by the presentation. Day or night, Solstice would shine bright.

"Our little girl had really made it." Kali smiled dreamily at the sight.

"Definitely." Ghira agreed. "Whoever was in charge of the aesthetic needs a raise."

"We should get a hedge." Kali declared.
"And a brand." Ghira added.

"Belladonna...uh..." Kali struggled.

"Booties?" Ghira suggested.

"I guess it does have a ring to it." Kali chuckled.

"Agreed, makes a lovely sound too." Ghira pantomimed a spank. Kali blushed, slapping him lightly as he laughed. Ghira got out and walked around the car to help Kali from her seat. The bulky cast on her ankle made movement awkward and difficult. After taking her crutch out of the back seat, Ghira grinned and scooped Kali up into his arms, eliciting a yelp of surprise. She wrapped her arms around his neck as he carried her up the stairs to the entrance. They pushed through the door and were met by a smiling Velvet.

Kali reached out to pull Velvet into a hug. "Hey sweetie." She greeted.

"Hey mum, dad." Velvet responded. "Drive safe?"

"Too safe." Kali complained. "He drove like a snail."

"You're in no position to critique my driving." Ghira teased.

"Oh shush." Kali huffed.

Velvet chuckled, leading the pair further inside. "Blake got roped into painting Nora." She said.

"Painting?" Ghira asked.

Velvet smirked, patting her stomach. "Nora saw this article on an artist who paints pregnant women." She explained. "She wanted to have a watermelon."

Kali stifled a giggle as the image of Nora cradling a watermelon like an infant popped into her mind. "Interesting." She managed before turning to Ghira. "Honey, you know I can walk."

"I know." Ghira nodded, not putting her down.

"Let me take the crutch at least." Velvet offered, not waiting for an answer before doing so.

"Thank you." Ghira said.

Velvet led Ghira and Kali on a tour. The first area was the obviously the lobby. There was no receptionist, as Winter and Velvet handled all inquiries. All guests were either expected, and could visit Winter directly, or would be met by one of the staff. Velvet pointed out Winter's office, which was securely locked, as it always was when she was not inside. Next was the costume wardrobe. Ghira finally put Kali down, allowing her to wander around the rows of garments, admiring the various styles and accessories. They had gathered quite a surplus over the years, most of which tended to just gather dust. Winter implemented a rule: if something was not needed for two months, someone could take it. Yang usually pilfered the leather jackets, Blake shared Yang's love of boots, Nora took the attention-grabbing and colorful articles, while Velvet and Pyrrha preferred dresses and foreign attire.

"Honey, look, a pirate's hat!" Kali called. She hobbled out from a row with a dark, wide brimmed hat with several large, frilly blue feathers as decoration.

"I thought pirates wore tricorns." Ghira raised his brow.
"That's just a stereotype." Kali noted. "This is a real pirate's hat, a captain's hat. Get down here."
Kali hobbled over as Ghira bent down, allowing her to perch the hat upon his head, at a respectable tilt. Kali stepped back to admire him as Ghira struck a proud pose. "There's the man I married, Captain Ghira of Menagerie!"

"I've always wanted a boat." Ghira declared.

"Ship." Velvet corrected.

"I wouldn't mind sailing again." Kali declared.

"Maybe we could go sometime." Ghira suggested.

"Ugh, pass." Velvet groaned. "I get seasick, really seasick."

"Well darn." Kali sighed.

After a bit more cosplay, Ghira scooped up Kali again and the tour continued. Velvet pointed out the bathrooms, the fire escape - just in case - and finally the makeup and dressing room, also known as Blake's studio. As they entered Blake's back was turned to them as she knelt in front of Summer, obscuring her from view. Nora, wearing a black sports bra to reveal her freshly painted watermelon belly, sat on a nearby chair, arms held behind her by a tall, blonde man wearing an unbuttoned dress shirt.

He reacted first. "Hey." Sun waved.

"Hey mum." Blake said without looking up from her work.

"Hello!" Kali cheered.

"Look at that booty!" Nora exclaimed. Kali rolled her eyes. Her kimono already hugged her form as it was, but with Ghira carrying her bridal style, it pulled even tighter against her rear, which Nora leered at.

"Oi, I'm right here!" Sun complained. He let go of Nora's hands to cover her eyes.

In response Nora reached back and squeezed his ass. "Hell yeah you are!" She cheered.

"Children are present." Blake deadpanned, still not taking her eyes off Summer as she applied careful brush strokes.

"My child is a watermelon, your argument is invalid." Nora declared.

"Done." Blake said, pulling back from Summer a bit to take in her work. "Now don't take off the hairband for ten minutes, okay?"

"Okay, thank you Aunty Blake!" Summer smiled.

"You're welcome Sum, no go say hi to grandma and grandpa." Blake suggested.

"Grandma, grandpa, I'm a kitty!" Summer giggled. A cat nose and whiskers were painted on her smiling face.

"Aw, you're so adorable!" Kali squealed.

Meanwhile, Blake stood and approached Nora, bending down to check over her stomach. "Alright,
"It's dry, but don't rub it." Blake warned. "And don't let anyone else rub it."

"Aw, darn." Nora sighed.

Blake smirked and ruffled Nora's hair. "Chin up, go show your girl." She instructed before turning to approach her parents. "Hey, drive safe? How's the leg?"

"Overly safe." Kali rolled her eyes at Ghira. "The leg's fine. Ghira is just being supportive."

"I've been lax on my workout." Ghira grinned.

"Are you calling me fat?" Kali asked with faux indignation.

Ghira chuckled. "There is nothing wrong with your body Kali." He declared.

"Have you shown 'em around yet?" Nora asked.

"Just the lobby and the wardrobe." Velvet replied. "Why don't you take over?"

Nora grinned maniacally, jumping up and borderline bouncing toward the door. "Oh, I'll show you the Boop Box!" She exclaimed.

"The what?" Kali asked.

"Come on!" Nora encouraged. She grabbed Sun by the hand and dragged him along.

"Go on, we'll be out in a minute." Blake waved. "Gotta' pack this away." She indicated the supplies strewn about the nearby dresser table.

"Pray for us?" Ghira asked.

"The Maidens can't help you." Blake smirked.

"Oh boy." Ghira sighed. He carried Kali along, following Sun and Nora, who turned and smiled as the pair approached.

"I'm Sun by the way." He introduced himself. "I'd shake your hand, but, you know."

"You're Nora and Pyrrha's partner?" Kali asked.

"Yeah, kinda'." Sun shrugged. "I don't think there's a word for what I am."

"Borrowed equipment!" Nora teased.

"Pfft, you plannin' on returning me Valkyrie?" Sun scoffed.

"Nope, called dibs Wukong." Nora countered.

"Are you planning to marry?" Ghira asked.

"Eh, dunno' yet." Nora shrugged. "Not even sure if it's legal. If we can't all be married on paper I don't see the point."

"There is a rather progressive temple in Porto Menagerie." Ghira noted. "They were the first to allow same sex marriage. I could make a call or two."

"Aw, that'd be awesome Papa Bell." Nora cheered. "You're definitely invited, even if we just get
rings made and dress Yang as a nun.”

"Okay, we need to do that.” Sun declared.

"Oh, we could have a costume afterparty!” Nora exclaimed.

"I can go as Spruce Lee again.” Sun thought aloud.

"And I can dress Pyrrha like an Amazon!” Nora added.

"Oh, we can be pirates!” Kali suggested. "You looked so nice in that hat. Maybe Winter will let us borrow it."

"Hmm, I would ne-“ Ghira started.

"Here we are!” Nora announced. Ghira stopped to behold Nora, presenting a white door, entirely plain and ordinary except for the word 'BOOP' stenciled on it in pink.

"Boop?” Kali asked.

"Exactly.” Nora nodded. "This was just an empty closet when Solstice got started, so I banged Pyrrha in it. Then we got caught for the fourth time by Yang and Winter because it wasn't exactly soundproof, and if I angle my fingers just right Pyrrha gets really loud.”

"Yang thought it was hilarious.” Sun noted. "Winter was less impressed.”

"But Yang, you know, convinced her it'd be a good idea to invest in.” Nora continued. She knocked twice, pausing before opening the door. Flicking a switch illuminated the room in a soft, amber light. It looked like a recording studio, minus any furniture, with sound-absorbing panels on the walls. Nora stepped in. "It's a tad warm, great for winter, not so much for summer. Plus you can sing really loud! HAVE I LOST MY MIN-"

Sun slammed the door shut, cutting off Nora almost completely. The group outside could just hear some very muffled singing. "It's not the comfiest place, but that doesn't stop anyone.” He declared.

"A modeling company, with a dedicated sex closet?” Ghira asked.

"Boop Box, Lewd Room, Sexbox Three-Sixty, and Route Sixty-Nine are some of the popular names.” Sun smirked. He opened the door.

"THIS IS HAPPENING!” Nora's singing now came through loud and clear.

"Later Nora, we're missing out on the catering.” Sun interrupted her singing.

"Oh, I saw nuggets!” Nora cheered. "Gotta' get some before they're gone! Anyway, room's free to use if you get randy. We have it professionally cleaned like the rest of the place, but still, be considerate and all, and play safe! I dunno' if Blakey wants a sibling...she's gonna' have lotsa' kids on her hands soon, hehe.”

Nora wandered off, leaving Ghira and Kali to look at each other, and Sun. "Babies on the mind, ya'know?” Sun shrugged before following.

Kali and Ghira remained there in silence for a moment. "You can't have kids anymore, right?” Ghira asked.

Kali chuckled. "That ship sailed years ago.”
Qrow had never been a fan of crowded places. Loud and claustrophobic was a bad combination for a military vet with PTSD. So when Yang talked about the party being thrown at Solstice, he was not exactly thrilled. But apparently there would be free drinks, and catering, not to mention all the hot chicks. How could he say no to that?

The party was less a party and more a family gathering. Winter was already there when Yang, Qrow and Summer arrived, having overseen the preparations personally. Pop music played at a reasonable volume through surround speakers, there was indeed professional catering - so Yang did not have to cook anything - and Nora quickly attracted Summer's attention, scooping the girl up and carting her away to babble with. With no need to worry over anything, Qrow and Yang grabbed some drinks and sought out Winter. They found her in conversation with a short, gothic-looking woman who sported a perpetually bored expression. The expression only broke for a moment, for a brief smile when Yang pulled her into a hug.

"Hey Mel, glad you came." Yang greeted her.

"The drinks are free here." Melanie shrugged, her indifference already returning.

Yang chuckled, pulling away to cup her face. "You doing okay?" Yang asked. "Any problems?"

"I'm fine Yang, I told you." Melanie sighed, rolling her eyes. "I've been taking it easy, talking to Glynda, talking to dad."

"Good, but talk to me more often, yeah?" Yang requested.

"Yes mom." Melanie huffed. "Who's the old man?"

Qrow chuckled, eyeing the woman as she eyed him. He should have been insulted by the label. He was not old. At the age of forty-four he could still keep up with his niece. Just because he had left the military did not mean he had skimped on his fitness regimen. Sure, he had an alcohol problem, but he was cutting down, a little. But back to the point at hand, Qrow was not bothered, not when this chick was smirking at him like that. God damnit, he loved eyeshadow.

"Oh, this thing?" Yang asked, pointing to him. "Just a dusty old Qrow."

"Hey." Qrow raised his beer in greeting.

"Hey." Melanie responded. "Well you two be all lovey dovey and stuff, I'm gonna' grab something to eat." She strolled off, brushing past Qrow as she did. He glanced over his shoulder in time to see her looking forward. God damnit, he loved snarky ones.

"A peach that one." Qrow joked.

"Mel's alright, just bitchy and goth." Yang chuckled.

"And good company." Winter added. "You could learn something from her."

"I maintain you looked hot in that bikini." Qrow insisted.

"I knew I forgot to block you." Winter sighed into her hand.

"Go socialize Qrow." Yang raised her fist in threat. "Make some friends, or enemies, something. Glynda and Raven should be around her somewhere."
Qrow could tell when he was not wanted. As much as he enjoyed teasing Winter - and would have liked to tease her a little more - he knew Yang's threats were not empty, and continued misbehavior would see him on the receiving end of a solid punch. He took in the room. He forgot what they called it. Yang had surely told him, but he was probably distracted by Summer, that little cutie. Whatever it was called, it was the place where they took pictures, but all the equipment had been packed away to make room for tables and a sound system.

On a nearby couch sat Pyrrha and Blake. Velvet and Sun stood to the side, chatting with a tall, dark skinned buff guy with green hair. Nora - with Summer perched on her shoulders - gesticulated and talked rapidly and excitedly to Blake, Pyrrha and a pale, red haired...guy? Was that a guy? Probably. Maybe he was being sexist. Mel...Melissa?...walked past him with a plate of food, glancing at him before slipping into a side room. He heard Raven's voice from inside, so he grabbed a plate of food for himself - God he loved chicken nuggets - and followed Mel in.

Pushing through the door, Qrow found himself in what seemed to be the breakroom. Benches and cupboards lined one wall, a large, round table took up half the room to his right, and two couches and a coffee table were to the left, occupied by Glynda and Raven with Mel sitting opposite. "Hey jackass, you actually came." Raven called to him.

Qrow resisted cracking the obvious joke as he circled the couch, dropping down next to the goth chick. "Rave, outta' the dungeon I see." Qrow smirked. Raven tossed one of her nuggets at him. He caught it easily, grinning before popping it into his mouth.

"Children, behave." Glynda admonished.

"We're barely younger than you." Qrow observed. Qrow never had asked Glynda about her age, though she probably would have just glared at him in response anyway.

"Age does not equal maturity." Glynda countered.

"Pfft, maturity was overrated. Qrow thought. Better immature than a killjoy.

"Have you given everyone here therapy?" Melanie asked.

"More or less." Glynda and Raven replied in unison.

"Jinx." Melanie waved her drink. "You owe me a rum and coke."

"Nmm!" Raven nearly choked mid swig. "Bad idea Mel. This one's a womanizer."

"Oh, I'm the womanizer?" Qrow asked, slapping a hand on his chest.

"Which one of us actually got married?" Raven challenged.

"Are we gonna' compare trainwrecks now?" Qrow shook his head, laughing.

"I had the integrity to try." Raven protested.

"And I had the sense to give up...before the third strike." Qrow taunted.
"So, what, you're gonna' survive off casual sex and porn for the rest of your life?" Raven pressed.

"It'll do me until someone worth a damn comes along, and it's not like I'm goin' from bar to bar, bangin' everyone in sight." Qrow defended himself. "I haven't slept with anyone in three months, Rave."

Raven managed a surprised look. "You're shittin' me?" She asked.

"Why would I lie about not getting laid?" Qrow countered.

"Because you're a weirdo who's fulla' shit." Raven answered.

"It's genetic." Qrow scoffed.

"Then mum jumped the fence for you." Raven joked.

"You wish." Qrow chuckled.

"I think that's quite enough." Glynda cut in.

"I think things should escalate." Melanie suggested.

"Melanie." Glynda glared at her.

Melanie, wouldn't have guessed that. Qrow thought. There was that smirk again. Goth chicks like leather, right?

"Fine, I'm going to see Yang." Raven declared. She stood and threw another nugget at Qrow as she passed. He did not bother to dodge it, and just sat there struggling not to laugh. Melanie looked amused and in his peripheral he could see Glynda just roll her eyes.

"You bring out the worst in each other." Glynda sighed as she got up.

"Guilty pleasure." Qrow raised his beer in toast.

Glynda scoffed. "Try not to corrupt Melanie." She shook her head before heading off after Raven.

"Why am I the enemy?" Qrow asked. "She started it?"

"Eat your nuggets Qrow." Glynda commanded.

Qrow scowled. Of course he would eat his nuggets. He loved the fucking things. He spotted Melanie pilfering one from his plate while he was distracted. "Enjoying the party?" He asked. Qrow fixed her with an amused look. Melanie bit into the nugget, like it was a chocolate bar in a commercial. God damnit, he loved red lipstick.

"Your sister's hot." Melanie declared.

"Yeah, she is." Qrow chuckled.

"Bitchy though." Melanie added. She swallowed, then popped the rest of the nugget into her mouth.

"That's Raven for ya'." Qrow smiled.

"Pity she's taken." Melanie noted.

"The fun ones usually are." Qrow sighed.
Melanie smiled, but not her normal smirk. That one was snarky, taunting and just a tad frosty. This one had some warmth to it. Qrow could see it approaching her eyes. It felt good to be honest.
"Wanna' bitch about life?" She finally asked. "Everyone else here is all happy and shit."

Qrow chuckled, holding his paper plate towards her. "Sounds like fun."

A few hours later, the party was in full swing. Blake had painted Nora's stomach like a watermelon - much to everyone's amusement - and Summer like a kitten - much to everyone's adoration. Blake's parents had joined them, Ghira ending up deep in political conversation with Winter and Glynda, Kali joining Nora in entertaining Summer. Every now and then Yang would spot Qrow or Melanie emerging from the break room to grab more snacks or beer before heading right back in, and right about the point Blake and Raven started breakdancing drunkenly, Ghira and Kali slipped away.

Yang checked her phone for what felt like the hundredth time that night, sighing in irritation as she was suddenly aware of an urge. She tapped Winter on the shoulder. "Just gonna' go to the bathroom, okay?" She said. Winter swayed a little, nodding, somehow finding a graceful response to the heavy techno beat. Yang peeked her on the cheek before leaving, making her way out of the studio and into one of the back halls.

"Playin' it safe guys?" Yang smirked. Their gazes snapped to her. Kali blushed and hid her face while Ghira looked like a deer in the headlights. Yang glanced down to see Kali's top pushed up, and respectfully turned away, chuckling. "Damn guys, didn't expect this. I'm impressed."

"Sorry." Kali squeaked.

"Oh, don't be sorry." Yang waved her off. "The sexbox exists for a reason!"

"Nora said it was okay." Kali explained.

Yang glanced back. Kali and Ghira were now standing, clothes back in order, though their faces were beet red. "And it's fine, none of us would have expected that." Yang grinned.

"I'll pay for the damages." Ghira offered.

"Sounds good to me!" Kali cut in. She grabbed her husband's hand and began to hobble away, flustered but grinning.

Yang chuckled before examining the door. Cheap, short screws seemed to be the problem. A man like Ghira going to pound town on these was a recipe for disaster. Yang was surprised that Nora and Sun had not broken it already. Perhaps they had loosened it. It was an easy fix, but right now Yang's need to urinate was extreme. She rushed to the bathroom and answered nature's call.
Yang washed her hands, drying them on a nearby towel before looking at her reflection in the bathroom's large mirror. She was definitely getting older, laugh lines were starting to become visible, as well as subtle creases beside her eyes. Once this would have bothered her. She was far more vain as a teenager than she was now. The only thing she really feared for was her hair. Winter loved Yang's hair, often stroking it when they relaxed together, washing it thoroughly when they showered together, burying her face in it when they spooned, breathing the gentle scent of Yang's citrus shampoo. Winter often called her beautiful. No, she did not call her beautiful, she stated it, like an undeniable fact, a law of nature.

Yang had been called many things, both kind and otherwise, and as a teen she often felt empowered by this. But as she grew, she realized people were rarely so genuine. Many were jealous, or covetous, viewing her as a potential rival or conquest. Many defined her by appearance alone, and that scared Yang, even more so when she looked inward. Her grades were average, she had difficulty concentrating, and her short temper often landed her in trouble.

Her choice to not pursue higher education in favor of taking care of Ruby had not been a difficult one. To Yang, her future lay in practical applications, where she earned her best grades. Carpentry, mechanics, culinary arts, and physical education were her strengths. They were skills she had been taught by Summer and Taiyang, skills she valued, both for the memories they held, and how useful they had come to be over the years.

Taiyang sucked at cooking, unless it was barbeque, so when Summer passed it fell to Yang, who spent hours memorizing the recipes in Summer's cookbooks. She still read through them from time to time. Both during Taiyang's depression, and after his death, Yang realized just how much work he did around the house, how much money was saved by doing their own repairs. She shuddered to imagine how much her old bike would have cost to maintain. Being able to do for herself was fulfilling and gave her a sense of independence. It was particularly so when she was able to step up and be a mother to Ruby, a breadwinner even, so that Ruby did not have to worry about the stability of their lives. Yang could do it, she could take care of them, everything would be alright. She could do this.

But everything went wrong, and piece by piece, Yang's life had crumbled around her, hitting rock bottom just as Qrow showed up to wish her a happy birthday. That was a hell of a bounce, and she got just enough air from it to almost feel better about herself, but the pressures of her emotions, the debt, and her stressful and unfulfilling job dragged her back down. Once, years prior, Yang would have hit on Winter, turned the insult into a snarky retort, but everyone has their breaking point, and Yang had been well past hers. For a depressed, drunk chick, Winter took the punch like a champ. She went down, but was not out, and it had not been a gentle punch. She did not even seem to bruise, though that could have just been the makeup.

Yang still found it hard to believe that a single punch had essentially saved her life. Going by how she had felt returning home that night, she was probably a few months, hell, a few weeks off walking into the ocean and drowning herself. It would have been easiest that way. There would be no mess left to clean up, and it would be quick, just one big breath of water and it would all be over. She had just been so tired, so incredibly done with her life. She had tried, Maidens she had tried, and for a time things had looked bright. Glynda was an incredible woman, often times simply holding her as she cried, venting her anguish as it resurfaced. Blake, Velvet, Nora, Sun and Pyrrha were all good friends, and being able to relate to them made Yang feel so much less alone. But when they were not around, when Yang had suffered through her job, or lay alone in her shitty apartment, the darkness closed in, and with it, the pain. They were not Ruby. They did not give her life meaning.

In Winter she had found a truly kindred spirit, a woman whose fresh wounds mirrored her own scars, who ventured out of her element, into a neighborhood ripped from a slasher film, to confront a
woman who likely as not would have attacked her on sight, leaving her black and blue, or worse. Knowing Winter, she would have accepted that without a fight. But Winter had given Yang a reason to live. First it was to help her, to steer her away from Yang's current state. Then, as she fell, it had been to make her proud, to be worthy of Winter's love.

It had not always been easy. There were still times when their minds wandered to darker places, but they always pulled through, even kicking and screaming on occasion. Anniversaries were the hardest. Weiss and Ruby's graves were incredibly painful to behold, even years later, but bit by bit, year by year, they healed, they loved, and they lived. And now here Yang was, standing in the luxury bathroom of a modeling studio, surrounded by friends, by family, alive and well, with a beautiful daughter, Ruby's daughter, Summer Rose...Xiao-Long...Schnee...poor girl. If she did not have some sort of identity crisis it would be a miracle.

*What a time and place to be retrospective?* Yang thought. Ghira and Kali were probably in the midst of an orgasmic daze a few rooms away, Blake and Raven were lost in drunken giggles, someone was definitely recording, and whatever the hell Qrow and Melanie were doing in the breakroom. Whatever it was they kept coming out for food and drink, so at least she knew their mouths were occupied. Pyrrha had looked to be nodding off and Nora would surely burn out sometime soon. Sun was always tired these days, though he hid it as best he could. Between two pregnant women and his job, Yang was surprised he had the energy to party, let alone chase after Nora.

Yang's phone vibrated. She hastily pulled it free of her pants pocket. A grin grew on her face as she read the text message. Flashing a smile at her reflection, Yang hurried from the room.
He could not do this. He should not do this. She deserved better than him. Everyone deserved better than him. Arslan deserved a better friend. Yang deserved someone who listened to her advice. Summer deserved a father who was there from the beginning, a father who put his foot down when it mattered. Maybe then he would have at least been able to say goodbye. Now he would be facing Ruby's visage, not immortalized in photograph but in flesh, his flesh, his blood, his kin. How would he feel? He never gave it much thought. How would Summer affect him should they meet? It was never a possibility to him. He would ensure Summer's safe care until she found a true family, then he would move on, one way or another.

Now Yatsuhashi sat in the lobby of Solstice Modeling, having been invited by Yang. Accompanying him was Arslan, who now sat at his side, a firm hand on his shoulder, anchoring him, calming him, if only enough to prevent his flight. It shamed him to admit that potential, but he had never been a good liar. He never liked lying - lies only brought pain - but so often did the truth hurt, that lies at times seemed the lesser of two evils. Was that how he had reached this point, taking the easy lie over the painful truth?

"Calm Yatsu, calm." Arslan soothed, moving her hand to his forearm, anchoring him, steadying his heartbeat. While they had both been extended an invitation, it was Arslan who had convinced him to come. Since his first visit to the orphanage, Arslan had made sure to keep in constant contact, inviting him back time and again. He had few hobbies, and he had given up his long hours of extra work, so he saw no reason not to humor her. Arslan became a source of warmth in his life, the first true friend he had made in years. The group of friends he had made in university drifted apart without Ruby, who's loving nature had attracted and acted as a social glue for the odd bunch. It was nice to hold casual conversation again, to smile and laugh genuinely, to know someone cared for him.

Eventually Arslan wore him down, and Yatsuhashi began interacting with the children at the orphanage. He felt hypocritical, but Arslan insisted it would be good for him, a form of therapy even. Swallowing his worries, he allowed Arslan to introduce him, and was soon swarmed by the tiny, fragile proto-humans. He was paranoid of falling over and crushing or accidentally stepping on them. Cursed, or blessed, with a naturally large build, combined with a regular exercise regimen and healthy diet, he was a veritable mountain of a man. This gave him as many advantages as disadvantages, mainly due to the intimidation he inspired in others, but apparently the children were exempt from this.

Now, in addition to socializing with Arslan, Yatsuhashi helped manage and entertain the children. He let them climb all over him, read to them, and taught them to meditate (with little success). It was indeed therapeutic. He found his days growing brighter and brighter, no longer spent alone and miserable, barely coping day to day. All was going well, until Yang called:

"I want you to meet Summer." Yang declared.

"Miss Xiao-Long." Yatsuhashi tried to protest.

"Yang." She cut in. "We're family Yatsu."
"I apologize, you're right." Yatsuhashi allowed. "But you know how I feel-"

"I do know how you feel." Yang confirmed. "But this isn't about you, or me. This is about Summer."

"I...Yang, she deserves-" Yatsuhashi resisted.

"She deserves to have you in her life." Yang cut him off. "She has a right to know her father."

"I haven't been a father to her Yang." Yatsuhashi countered. "I don't deserve the title."

"Right, sending monthly, beefy checks to the orphanage doesn't count as fatherly care." Yang allowed. "Yatsu, I know it's hard, but I think you need to look at the bigger picture. Years down the line, how do you think she'll feel if we keep lying to her? She's been through enough. We're having a gathering at Solstice this weekend, I want you to come, please."

"I...I'll give it some thought." Yatsuhashi relented.

"Fine, good enough." Yang sighed. "Take care Yatsu."

"You too."

Naturally Yatsuhashi had panicked, shutting himself away and brooding, unintentionally neglecting his schedule at the orphanage. Just as naturally, it was Arslan who snapped him out of it, dressing him down, dressing him up, and borderline dragging him along. As scared as he was, deep down, he knew it was necessary. It was just so much easier to hide, and he needed someone to give him the required push.

Hearing footsteps, Yatsuhashi tensed, looking to the hallway. Yang appeared, and his stomach fell, as beside her was Summer. "Miss Arslan?!" Summer cheered.

"Hello Summer, how have you been settling in?" Arslan asked.

"Really great!" Summer exclaimed. "My room is so big now!"

"Well that's good." Arslan chuckled. "I'm glad you're happy. Yang, it's good to see you."

"You too Arslan." Yang responded.

"Who are you?" Summer asked the hulking man beside Arslan.

Yatsuhashi swallowed, staring at his daughter. He had never seen her so close before. He had seen pictures on occasion - birthdays and special events - but never in person. Her resemblance to both himself and Ruby...it scared him. "I'm...I'm Yatsuhashi, but you can call me Yatsu." He finally managed.

"Hello Mister Yatsu." Summer smiled.

"Hello Summer...it's good to finally meet you." Yatsuhashi declared.

"How do you know me?" Summer asked.

Yatsuhashi flinched, but maintained a tight smile. "I...knew your mother...she was a dear friend." He struggled. "I miss her very much."

"Did you know my dad?" Summer asked.
Yatsuhashi paused, Arslan and Yang tensed, watching as he sat staring into Summer's silver eyes. The same eyes that had once filled him with such happiness now inspired only fear and guilt. He slumped, shaking his head. "No, I'm sorry Summer." He lied.

Yang let out a small sigh, closing her eyes and frowning. "Summer, why don't you introduce Yatsu to the others?" She suggested.

"Okay!" Summer cheered. "Come on Mister Yatsu! Nora has heart nipples!" She ran forward, pulling on his arm, slowly dragging him to his feet.

"Oh?" Yatsuhashi asked. "Interesting."

Yang's frown did not fade as Yatsuhashi looked away, dragged along by the little girl. Hearing the footsteps fade, Yang sighed, taking his place next to Arslan and sinking into the couch. "I'm sorry Yang," Arslan apologized.

"Not your fault Arslan." Yang clapped her hand on Arslan's thigh. "Thanks for getting him here."

"He really has come a long way." Arslan insisted.

"I know...just not far enough." Yang sighed.

"Yet." Arslan encouraged.

"Hopefully...it's just...fuck." Yang groaned. "This is gonna' complicate things down the line. We're all lying to her."

"Maybe she'll understand, when she's older." Arslan suggested.

"Yeah, or she'll freak out." Yang countered. "Oh yeah, Uncle Yatsu was your dad the whole time, fancy that." She buried her face in her hands.

"Have faith Yang." Arslan said.

"Faith has been in short supply for me Arl'." Yang scoffed. "All I can do is hope."

Summer introduced Yatsuhashi around, to various reactions. Glynda in particular strongly suggested he make another appointment in the near future, as he had not followed up after their initial meeting. After a few questions - some deflected, some answered truthfully - Summer was abducted by Nora for piggyback rides, and Yatsuhashi settled on the couch with Arslan and Pyrrha for some quiet conversation. Yang distracted herself with more alcohol, though after the breakdancing incident, Winter had elected to sober up for the drive home. They would most likely be taking a taxi regardless, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Ghira and Kali rejoined, less frazzled but more flustered than before. Nora filled up on nuggets with Summer, and eventually they dozed off on some pillows swiped from the props room. Pyrrha and Sun ended up slow dancing when the music changed tempo, joined by Ghira and Kali, along with Blake and Velvet, who were quite drunk. Qrow and Melanie never left the breakroom, though the door remained open, and no noises audible over the music were evident. It was only when the night was winding down, and Glynda half escorted and half carried an inebriated Raven out, that Yang thought to check on them.

"Guys?" Yang asked. She peeked her head into the room, and spotted Qrow sat on the couch, head slumped forward, Melanie nowhere to be seen. Creeping forward, Yang saw numerous empty beer
bottles neatly lined up on the coffee table and two paper plates, one holding the remains of a slice
half eaten. Then Yang spotted Melanie. "Oh well." Melanie was snuggled innocently into Qrow's
side, her usually stoic frown slightly less firm. Yang could not help but smile.

"What's going on?" Winter shuffled in. Yang held a finger to her lips and beckoned her over to see.
"Well that's...interesting."

"Not a smidge of lipstick on Qrow." Yang observed. "They've really just been talking the entire time
from the looks of things."

"And drinking half the stock." Winter added.

"Not like you can say any better." Yang noted.

Winter scoffed, but grinned. "Well, I'm tired. Should we wake them?"

"Nah, they look...comfy." Yang decided. "I dunno' what's going on, but we can deal with it
tomorrow. Don't you think?"

Winter yawned languidly. "Hm, fine." She agreed. "But if he did anything untoward, he's sleeping
in the yard tomorrow."

"Yeah, yeah, come on pillow princess." Yang smirked.

"That's pillow Queen to you." Winter declared.

Yang laughed softly as they left the breakroom, sliding an arm around Winter's waist. They stopped
to see Ghira lift a dozing Kali into his arms. He thanked Winter and Yang before leaving, with a
barely standing Blake and Velvet shambling after. Sun pried a sleeping Summer from Nora's arms,
gently handing her over to Yang and thanking Winter before carrying a mumbling Nora from the
room. As Sage and Scarlet had long since departed, Yatsuhashi and Arslan were the last to leave,
with him stopping to see Summer one more time.

"She looks so peaceful." Yatsuhashi observed.

"When she's out of energy, and not tearing about the place." Yang chuckled quietly.

Yatsuhashi smiled, closing his eyes. "I...know I disappointed you, and I apologize for that." He
sighed. "Maybe sometime in the future, I'll be ready."

"Maybe." Yang smiled tightly. "Take care Yatsu, and you too Arslan. Hope you enjoyed
yourselves."

"I did." Arslan nodded. "Thank you for inviting me Yang, Winter."

"Have a good night Arslan, Yatsu." Winter bid them farewell. With a final nod and a bow,
Yatsuhashi and Arslan departed as well, leaving Yang and Winter to survey the damage. "I expected
more mess."

"You always expect the worst." Yang teased.

"It's in my nature, and I'm usually right." Winter noted.

"Well, tonight you're wrong, hooray." Yang joked.

Sighing, Winter smiled. She surprised Yang with a pat on the rear. "Come on love, let's go home."
With a throbbing in his head, Qrow was forced unwillingly into wakefulness. He could already feel it, this was a hangover best slept off. His position was somewhat uncomfortable however, twisted on a couch as he was, no doubt adding to his misery. He was about to get up to stretch when he realized there was a pressure on his lap. Forcing his eyes open and straining against the insufficient light, he looked down. *Shit.* There was Mel, her head resting on his legs. **Winter was going to be pissed. Yang was going to be...well...Yang. If they had done anything untoward...had they?**

The previous night was a bit of a blur. He remembered having a long and lively chat with the girl sleeping on his lap, then, nothing. What had they gotten up to? Had they just been eating and drinking, bitching about life until they passed out. There were certainly enough beer bottles lined up on the table to explain the gaps in his memory, but they told him nothing of what else had gone on. **Maybe Mel would remember. Shit. Maybe Mel would remember.** He had been on the receiving end of more than his share of slaps and punches, but Mel looked like the sort who would really leave him hurting. Worse, there was no way he could extricate himself without waking her. He was going to have to face her. But how?

The matter was decided for him when Mel groaned and stirred.

Melanie felt a warmth and a softness about her head. It was a feeling she remembered, a feeling she relished, curled up on the couch with her head in her sister's lap. It made her want to snuggle in and sleep some more...but that could not be right. Miltia was gone. **Then who...** Melanie turned and looked up. She saw a nervous-looking Qrow staring down at her. **What happened last night?** She could not remember exactly, just a lot of drinking, talking, and more chicken nuggets than it was healthy for ten people to eat. **Had they gotten up to anything else?**

"Morning Mel." Qrow managed, though his voice was a bit weaker than Melanie remembered.

"Mornin'...where..." Melanie started groggily.

"I think we're still at Solstice." Qrow replied. "We must have passed out or something. You look kinda' pale, are you okay? Should I get a bucket or somethin'?"

Melanie did not feel great. The memories of her sister had come flooding back and threatened to drag her down, but she forced them to the back of her mind. "I'll be alright, just not a morning person." She lied. She looked Qrow over. She sat up, stretched, and looked again. "Well, there's no lipstick on you, so I guess we didn't do anything." Melanie breathed a sigh of relief. Not that she had anything against the guy, it just would have been embarrassing to have done *something* without remembering it.

"That's a relief." Qrow smiled, the nerves seemingly gone. "Should check one more spot though." With Melanie sitting up and out of the way, he lifted up the waistband of his pants and peered inside. "Nope, all clear."

"I should probably be offended." Melanie observed.

"Somebody had to go there." Qrow grinned.

"Maybe we *could* go there...another time." Melanie winked.

"Uh...I...um..." Qrow stammered.

"Calm down, I'm just messin' with ya'." Melanie chuckled.
"Well then." Qrow struggled to regain his composure. It was too early and he was too hungover to deal with this kind of teasing. Not that he did not love it. "If that clock is accurate, we've been out for a long time. We should probably head home."

"Yeah, I could use a shower." Melanie declared. She bent down to sniff her shirt. "I think I spilled some beer on myself."

"Happens to the best of us." Qrow joked. "I should probably head home and spend some time with my family - precious memories and all that - but how about we meet up later, get some drinks? I don't remember everything, but I think we had a pretty good time, may as well keep it rollin'."

"Well, I live above a nightclub, so when you're ready, just head over to my place." Melanie agreed. "Junior's. If you don't know where it is, ask Yang, she used to work there."

"That's where she had her shitty bouncer job?" Qrow asked.

"Sure is." Melanie confirmed. "Now that I think about it, I should introduce you to one of the bartenders. I think you'll get along famously."

"It's a date." Qrow smirked.

Melanie smiled briefly before her usually bored frown returned. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves."

Chapter End Notes

End Season 2

Sorry again for the late posting, lots of little delays, plus forgetfulness.
Welcome back to Solstice for our third season!

Qrow strolled into Junior's in the mid afternoon. The place was empty but for the staff and a couple seated at a table in the back. It was a rather large club, far better kept and better lit than the bars he usually frequented, and the music was too upbeat for his liking. But that did not matter, he was not there for the ambiance. As he sidled up to the bar, a buff, bearded man in sunglasses approached.

"What can I get you?"

"Gin and tonic." Qrow replied.

"Anything to eat?" The man asked.

"Eh...not yet." Qrow refused.

"Alright." The man nodded. "Rave! Gin and tonic!"

"Rave?" Qrow was taken by surprise. Sure enough, Raven stepped out from a back room, taking her place behind the bar. She failed to notice Qrow as she started mixing his drink. "Shit, you work here?"

"Wait a...Qrow...shit." Raven groaned.

"I didn't know you had a job." Qrow teased. "Thought you were more the moochin' type."

"I may not need the money, but I like to feel useful." Raven protested.

"You get bored when your girl's at work, huh?" Qrow suggested.

"Yep." Raven confirmed. She slid the finished drink in front of her brother. "What brings you here of all places?"

"Just stopped by to see a friend." Qrow replied.

"Friend?" Raven scoffed. "You don't have friends."

"Hey bossman!" Qrow waved to the man who had taken his order.

"Call me Junior." The man insisted. "What do you need?"

"Is Melanie around?" Qrow asked. "She said she lives upstairs."

"Oh, you're Qrow then." Junior smiled. "I'll go get her." He left the room through the door Raven had come through.

"Please don't fuck around with my boss' daughter." Raven sighed.
"Relax, we just had a good time chatting last night, figured we could pick it up again, sober this time," Qrow explained. "I promise I won't accidentally get you fired."

"Promise me you won't get me intentionally fired either." Raven demanded.

"I have no immediate plans, but I won't rule it out." Qrow smirked.

"Have I ever told you that I hate you?" Raven grumbled.

"Only every time we see each other." Qrow chuckled. He finished his drink, then slid the glass toward his sister. "Hit me."

"Oh, I'll hit you…" Raven started.

"Hey Qrow." Melanie cut in, emerging from the back room. "You took your sweet time."

"Nice to see you too Mel." Qrow rolled his eyes. "Nice place you've got here."

"It's alright." Melanie shrugged. She rounded the bar and took a seat beside Qrow. "Order anything?"

"Just drinks." Qrow replied. "Your old man cook anything good?"

"The burgers are pretty solid." Melanie suggested.

"Alright, I'll have a burger, with fries." Qrow decided. "You get that Rave?"

"One burger with spit, coming right up." Raven responded. She punched the order into the computer behind the bar.

"She's lovely, isn't she?" Qrow joked.

"She mixes a mean cocktail." Melanie observed. "I'll have my usual."

"Yes ma'am." Raven nodded, mixing Melanie's drink.

"So, how's life at Solstice?" Qrow asked.

"It's a job." Melanie answered. "One I can't afford to fuck up, my last chance. No pressure."

"Yeah, but my niece treats ya' right, doesn't she?" Qrow redirected.

"Everyone's very nice...too nice." Melanie complained. "How's...what do you do?"

"Self-employed." Qrow said. "I've got a nice leatherworking shop on Patch. It's doin' pretty good. I was even able to hire someone to work the place so I could take a few days off. Put every dime I had and the last couple years of my life into that place. It's been a real-

"Financially successful." Melanie cut him off. "Tick that box."

"Oh?" Qrow grinned. "Am I marriage material?" Melanie glared at him. "Hmm...where have I seen that look…" He glanced over at Raven, who was similarly staring daggers into him. "Yep, there it is."

Junior emerged from the kitchen carrying a large tray that held two plates. He set it down on the bar near Qrow. "One burger with fries." Junior placed the plate before Qrow. "And a grilled chicken
sandwich." He set the other plate in front of Melanie. "Enjoy."

"Cheers." Qrow smiled. He picked up his burger and took a bite out of it. He barely took the time to chew and swallow before speaking. "Holy shit, this is good. The bars I usually go to can't touch this stuff."

"If nothing else, dad's a great cook." Melanie praised.

Qrow took another bite, this time speaking with his mouth full. "You've gotta' good thing going here. Livin' at a place like this, must be awesome."

"I hate it." Melanie sighed. Qrow could see in the way she slumped and looked down that she was not just being angsty. "As soon as I have the money, I'm moving out. Too many bad memories here. I think there are some cheap apartments on the east side of town."

"You mean where Yang used to live?" Qrow asked. "You really don't wanna' live there."

"The sooner I get out of here, the better, and the cheaper the place, the sooner." Melanie explained.

"Uh...well shit." Qrow was at a loss. He knew the pain of losing a loved one, the way memories could connect to places and bring that agony rushing back. "I've got a spare room if you're interested."


"I'm listening." Melanie responded.

"It's right by the ferry so the commute isn't too bad." Qrow added. "It might seem a bit weird to move in with someone you just met but...shit, it's really weird. I just don't wanna' see a friend go through pain like this."

"I...right by the ferry huh?" Melanie managed.

"You're not seriously considering it." Raven tried to intercede. "This is crazy, you can't-"

"Sure, what the hell." Melanie shrugged. "If it doesn't work out I could always...come back here."

"You're seriously moving in with a guy you met yesterday?" Junior finally regained his wits. "Melanie, I know it's hard, but-"

"Qrow's an alright guy." Melanie noted. "Yang vouches for him, and so does my boss...sort of. I know you're worried about me, but I can take care of myself."

"Melanie..." Junior trailed off and sighed. "Do you really want to do this?"

"Yeah." Melanie confirmed.

"Alright." Junior relented.

"I won't try anything funny bossman." Qrow declared.

"That's right." Junior got in Qrow's face. "You won't. Unless you want me showing up at your place with that." Junior pointed above the bar, to a scratched crimson baseball bat.

"Message received." Qrow nodded, eyeing the bat.
"Oh lay off dad." Melanie huffed. "Besides, if he tries anything, I'll rip his balls off and shove them
down his throat."

"I believe you." Qrow shuddered.

Junior smiled. "That's my girl."

"Is that a Breachers bat?" Qrow asked.

"Yeah, you're a fan?" Junior replied.

"Nah, Tai was though." Qrow shook his head.

Raven rolled her eyes. "Ugh, don't remind me."

"What will we have for dessert?" Kali asked, holding one side of the menu, Summer holding the
other. Along with Blake and Velvet, they were dining at a local pub and restaurant. For Blake,
Velvet and Summer, the lunch was something of a tradition. One day a week, the couple would take
the little girl to lunch at a different restaurant, then to do something fun, whatever Summer might
fancy.

"They have great pavlova." Blake replied.

"You've been here before?" Velvet asked.

"Yeah, it was ages ago though." Blake answered. "They might have changed."

"Can we have cheesecake?" Summer requested.

"I like cheesecake." Kali noted.

"Cheesecake it is." Blake agreed.

"Thank you!" Summer cheered.

"Do you like cheesecake?" Kali asked.

"Hmmmm." Summer hummed in confirmation. "Aunty Yang made some, and it was really good!"

"Yang can cook?" Kali asked.

"Aunty Yang does all the cooking." Summer nodded. "She says Aunty Winter could burn salad."

"It's true." Blake added.

"Don't ask her about it though." Velvet advised. "It's a touchy subject."

"How on…well, maybe Yang and I can compare recipes!" Kali suggested. "I like her personality.
She seems like a lovely friend."

"She's my closest friend." Blake declared. "We might have ended up together if Yang was in a better
place when we met."

"It never stopped her from hitting on you, or us for that matter." Velvet noted.

"How else would Yang show affection?" Blake chuckled.
"Hugs...and compliments...yeah, good point." Velvet shrugged. "She's just a little too affectionate sometimes."

"Then talk to her about it." Blake said.

"But then she'll get all understanding and considerate, but in a sad way where I feel like the bad guy." Velvet complained.

"Because you're a big jealous meany who's afraid of being seduced by the beautiful blonde bombshell." Blake smirked.

"I'm tired of Winter glaring at me." Velvet huffed.

"That's just her resting facial expression." Blake scoffed.

"It doesn't feel that way!" Velvet protested.

"Aunty Yang says she's bursting so full of love, she wants to vomit rainbows!" Summer squealed.

Kali burst out laughing. "Oh Maidens that's adorable! I need to spend more time with this girl."

"Well maybe you can stay the night when we drop off Summer." Blake suggested.

"Would Winter mind?" Kali asked.

"Probably not." Velvet replied. "Unless she's in a bad mood, so it depends on Qrow."

"Oh, he seemed nice though, talking to that frowny girl." Kali observed.

"Who knows what's going on there..." Velvet said.

"He's Yang's uncle, which means he drives Winter insane on a good day." Blake explained. "He's been staying there when he visits."

"If he's still there, will there be room for me?" Kali wondered aloud.

"You can stay in my room." Summer beamed. "My bed's huge!"

Kali smiled and held Summer's hand. "Oh thank you dear. If only my beloved daughter was so kind as to share her bed with me."

"I sleep in the nude." Blake deadpanned.

"Something popped into my head and I can't stop wondering." Kali switched gears. "Do you ever have trouble mixing up underwear? It's never been an issue with me, because Blake was so much smaller than me and I could never confuse Ghira's underwear with anyone else's. He always wears briefs, despite how amazing he looks in a speedo, and I can't stand the constriction so I either go without or..."

"Mom!" Blake roused.

"We color code, pretty much everything really." Velvet explained. "It was Blake's idea."

"Velvet." Blake whined.

"All my undies are red." Summer smiled.
"Summer!" Blake groaned.

After dinner and dessert, the question was what to do next. Summer exclaimed that she had seen a park nearby, with a long slide down the side of a hill. She was not the only one excited to try it.

"Wheeeeeee!" Kali cried, Summer giggling in her lap as they slid down the moderate incline. A child at heart, Kali had no issue expressing her enjoyment, especially given the state of her life until recently. Any excuse to revel in her joy was taken without a hint of hesitation.

"Is your leg okay grandma?" Summer asked as they slid to a halt where the slide flattened out at the base of the hill.

Kali pulled Summer into a tighter embrace. "Yes sweetie, I've never felt better. Want to go again?"

"Yes please!" Summer cheered.

From a bench nearby, Velvet tracked the other two with her camera, capturing every smile, every laugh and every cry with professional precision. There were few things so beautiful as joy, and even fewer so easily recorded, relived and appreciated. Years from now, this video would stand as a monument to their happiness in this moment. Velvet and Blake admired Kali as she frolicked as playfully as she could with their so very nearly adopted daughter Summer. The leg brace barely seemed to phase her.

"Dad used to tell me mom always wanted children." Blake suddenly spoke up. Velvet hummed in question, not taking her eye from the camera. "Well, baby crazy he said, but the point remains. She wanted children, as many as possible. It was her dream." Velvet looked over to see a sad smile on her wife's face. "Dad wasn't as enthusiastic. Even then he was dedicated to his work, but he wanted to see her happy, so they made me. Only I wasn't the easiest birth, and the doctors said it wouldn't be safe to have more children. So here mom was with one child and an octuplets' worth of love to shower her with."

"Oh how terrible." Velvet scoffed.

"I know right?" Blake chuckled. "I thought I was gonna' die from all the smothering."

"How ever did you survive?" Velvet teased.

"I very nearly didn't." Blake sighed. "What with mom talking about the future and grandkids, and it was a rollercoaster going from weirded out and disgusted to scared shitless I was gonna' disappoint her when I started liking girls more than boys." Those last words came out as a whisper, and Velvet wrapped an arm around Blake's waist, pulling her closer, pecking her on the temple.

"So that's why you never came out." Velvet observed.

"I feel so stupid, now more than ever." Blake groaned. "I pushed her away, and I pushed dad away, and he kept trying to pull me back because it was making mom sad, and then Ilia and I broke up and things got worse. I just wanted to run away, and you know how that turned out." Blake's tone was sarcastic, but her pain was evident. Velvet had stopped recording by that point, putting the camera down to focus entirely on her emotional spouse, wrapping their arms around each other. "And now here we are, I have a second chance. I can do things right this time Velv, I can make her proud."

Blake looked at Velvet through teary eyes and kissed her. Velvet did not hesitate to melt into it. Blake was always so warm, so passionate, so genuine. She could kiss her forever and a day without tiring. Her love was like a drug, and Velvet was completely addicted, left breathless as they giggled.
in one another's arms. "I guess you wanna' try again?" Velvet whispered.

Blake grinned, looking to the side, towards her mother and Summer. "Look at them. Mom looks so alive, Summer is so happy, they're a family already. But at the end of the day we have to take her back home...and then we're alone again. As much as we love her, Summer isn't our daughter, a few hours a week isn't enough...so yeah, I wanna' try again. And I want mom to be there with us."

Yang answered the knock at the door and was immediately grabbed around the legs by a very energetic Summer. "Aunty Yang, we had cheesecake and went to the park and went on a really big slide!"

"That's awesome Sum." Yang smiled. "Makes me wish I was there too."

"Velvs recorded most of it." Blake noted.

"I'll send you a copy." Velvet offered.

"Professionally edited no doubt." Winter joked, walking up behind Yang. Summer detached from Yang and latched onto Winter. "Thanks for bringing her back in once piece."

"Aunty Winter, can we play a video game?" Summer requested.

"Sure, but say goodbye to Blake, Velvet and Kali first." Winter replied.

"Bye, I love you!" Summer cheered. She rushed off into the house giggling, followed by Winter as she waved to the Belladonnas.

"She's so cute." Kali smiled.

"She really is." Yang agreed.

"Thanks for sharing her with us." Velvet chuckled.

"Thanks for giving me and Winter a day to ourselves." Yang smirked.

"Um...I don't want to impose, but Yang, I'd like to get to know you and Winter better, and I was wondering if I could spend the night?" Kali rambled.

"Oh, sure." Yang responded. "We don't have a guest room, but the couch is open."

"That's alright, and Summer offered to share her bed anyway." Kali laughed.

"Wasn't your uncle on the couch?" Blake asked.

"He was." Yang confirmed. "But he showed up earlier, grabbed all his stuff, and said he had to go back to Patch."

"Any idea why?" Velvet asked.

"Nope." Yang shrugged. "He seemed excited though. Maybe he got a big order or something. He was supposed to head back tomorrow anyway."

"Well, I suppose I'll take his place then." Kali suggested.

"You can try." Yang grinned. "Something tells me you won't drink a whole bottle of liquor...but..."
overnight.

"I think baking a cake would be more my speed." Kali demurred.

"That's fun too." Yang said. "Why don't you go play with Summer. She'll love to game with her grandma."

"I'm afraid I'm not very good at video games." Kali warned. "Blake had a system when she was little and I could never figure out the controller."

"That was a long time ago too." Blake added. "The controller only had like three buttons."

"It doesn't matter if you're any good." Yang looked back, then leaned in to whisper to Kali. "Summer's terrible." Yang laughed. "She'll just be happy to have another player."

"In that case, I think I will join her." Kali decided. Yang stepped aside to allow her to walk past.

"Take good care of my mom, don't spoil her or anything." Blake deadpanned. "Make sure she doesn't eat too much and get sick. Don't feed her after midnight."

"Is that what I sound like when I hand over Summer?" Yang asked.

"Exactly." Velvet confirmed.

"Hmm, maybe I should be a bit less protective." Yang thought aloud.

"You know that's never gonna' happen." Blake charged.

Yang thought for a moment. "Nope, probably not."
The rest of the afternoon was enjoyable for all involved. Summer and Yang taught Kali to play a simple racing game. In spite of her lack of skill, they enjoyed themselves greatly, falling off the tracks, speeding off jumps and hitting each other with powerups. It was thrilling to both of them, and ultimately tiring for the younger of the two. Winter was already drowsy after a long day spent enjoying some rarely earned privacy, and elected to take Summer to bed for a nap until dinner, leaving Kali and Yang to talk shop.

"No, it's not that Winter could burn salad, she has burned salad." Yang laughed as she stirred the contents of the slow cooker, the curried chicken smell filling the kitchen with its strong scent.

"How?" Kali scoffed. "How do you burn salad? You don't even cook it!"

"Well, I wasn't in the room, so I didn't see it, but the way Winter tells it, she'd just finished mixing the salad, poured some dressing on it, turned around to put the bottle in the fridge, and when she turned back it was on fire." Placing the lid back on the cooker, Yang turned to meet Kali's befuddled gaze. "I got there in time to find her shouting obscenities as she tossed the flaming bowl out the back door and into the sand." Kali started laughing, and Yang continued. "I asked her what happened and she just started shaking, stammering and stuttering and trying so hard to figure it out that she just fell apart and started crying on the spot. I felt like shit because I was laughing so hard while I hugged her."

Both Kali and Yang were breathless, trying to keep quiet while hysterical. "How?!" Kali managed between bouts of laughter.

"I don't know!" Yang chuckled. "Like, a chemical reaction? Act of God? Ruby and Weiss fucking with us from beyond? Anything's possible, it was just that stupid." Yang recovered, wiping her eyes of tears as Kali was still wracked with giggles.

"Who's Weiss?" Kali asked, taking a deep breath.

"Oh." Yang sobered quickly. "Weiss was Winter's younger sister. She passed about a year after Ruby."

"Oh, that poor girl, both of them...all of you." Kali sighed. "You've gone through so much."

"Yeah, but we made it, and we found each other in the process, all of us." Yang smiled. "It's a hell of a silver lining, but I appreciate it."

"Were they the sort to set things on fire?" Kali returned the smile.

Yang laughed. "Ruby, maybe if she thought it'd work. Weiss? From what I hear no, but I like to think they're up there in the heavens frolicking together, looking down at us and sending little messages however they can."

"You're a woman of faith?" Kali asked.

"Not really?" Yang shrugged. "I've never been to church or really prayed. I dunno' if I believe. I just...hope. I hope that when I talk to Ruby she can hear me, that when I visit her grave she's maybe sitting next to me, telling me she loves me too, that I'm doing well, that she misses me too, and is
waiting for me to join her…” Yang caught herself, noting Kali's kind but worried gaze, and smiling. "Not that it'll be anytime soon. I'm a mummy now, and soon I'll be a wife, and a godmother, and Blakey needs her best friend. No, I've got too much to do before I go.” Yang turned to stir the curry again, but had barely removed the lid before an arm wrapped around her own.

"It's okay to have moments of weakness Yang.” Kali soothed. "At my worst, I considered drastic measures too. Blake was, and still is my world, and without her...everything seemed so grey. But I persevered, like you do, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have found my girl again, and to have met her friends, and Summer too. You have a wonderful family Yang, you're a wonderful person. Don't bottle things up when you have so many who will listen."

Yang set the lid down, instead laying a hand over Kali's, taking a shaky breath. "Sometimes I dream...that she's there when I wake up, or when I've gone somewhere, or when I'm visiting her...we talk, and laugh and play like we used to...then every time, there's a light, and she's walking into it, and I go to follow her, but no matter how fast I run she just seems to get farther and farther away...waking up from that is the most painful thing I ever go through. Sometimes Winter is awake, and she helps me through it, but usually I just try to stay quiet, wishing everything was a nightmare, that I'd wake up and...she'd still be there with me. It's even stranger now Summer's here, because I can just go into her room and...it's like she is still here, but then she wakes up, and calls me mummy, and it hurts, because Ruby should be here. I should be Aunty Yang, helping Mama Rose raise her beautiful darling girl, but I'm not. I'm mummy, and it's like raising Ruby all over again.” Yang choked and Kali pulled her into an embrace, Yang burying her face in the shorter woman's shoulder as she sobbed, comforted by gentle hands rubbing her back, and a soothing voice in her ear. "It's okay, I've got you, let it out, you're going to be okay.” Kali whispered.

Yang tightened her grip, and Kali smiled. It felt good to help someone vent, to comfort them. She used to do so when Blake was growing up, when she would skin her knees, when she would clash with the narrow minded, when her friendship with Ilia fell apart, Kali was there to soothe her however she could. It was her purpose in life, to care and nurture. Yang, as strong as she may be, needed this. Blake was better at hiding her feelings, maybe she needed it too. Kali hoped that should that be the case, Blake would open up on her own. The least Kali could do was be patient. She had waited this long to find her again. She could wait a little longer still.

Pregnancy was a constant struggle for Pyrrha. It was not so much the physical aspects as the psychological side. The hormones had caused a shift in her personality. Gone was her calm logic, replaced by occasional irrationality and emotions she found hard to control. She had stopped seeing patients, Glynda covering them for her, as their emotional stories tended to inspire overly emotional reactions. She could have stayed at home, relaxing with Nora, and waited it out, but she hated feeling useless. So she returned to work to once again serve as Glynda's secretary and assistant.

There was also one patient Pyrrha had to see herself. Pyrrha knew sign language - and beyond a few basic greetings - Glynda did not, and so could not take over Pyrrha's one mute patient. The sessions were quite stressful, the patient - Neo - was in a very difficult situation, and one Pyrrha could not help be affected by. But Pyrrha battled through, suppressing her emotions as much as possible until she departed. It was exhausting, but luckily Nora and Sun had the perfect solution. After Neo's appointment, the pair would stop by to share lunch with Pyrrha, giving her a chance to relax and recover.

Nora and Sun arrived at the office exactly on time. Nora's pregnancy related change of personality turned out to be nearly the opposite of Pyrrha's. She had become focused and detail-oriented nearly to the point of obsessive compulsion. Being punctual was probably her biggest preoccupation, much
to the surprise of Pyrrha and Sun. Nora had always been a free spirit, the sort to show up whenever. Now she scheduled her days, pushing Pyrrha and Sun to do so as well.

Nora and Sun were greeted by Glynda, who sat at the desk in the waiting room. She informed them that Pyrrha’s appointment was running long, then excused herself to go have her own lunch. After a few minutes, the office door opened, and Pyrrha stepped out into the waiting room, joined by a short girl with multicolored hair, presumably Neo. They were obviously signing to one another, though Sun and Nora could read none of it.

Neo looked at Sun and smiled. "So that's your boyfriend huh? Hot."

"Uh, yes well, time for you to go." Pyrrha said aloud, her fingers failing her.

"See you next week." Neo signed. She glanced at Sun. "And I hope I see you too."

Just as Neo walked out and closed the door behind her, Pyrrha took a deep breath and flopped down in the chair at the desk. She slumped, tears welling in her eyes. "Neo's got it so hard. No job, no savings, just a disability check from the government. I wish I could do more to help."

"You could get her a job at Solstice." Nora suggested.

"I tried that." Pyrrha shook her head. "When I offered she said she doesn't want charity, and that she doesn't want to be a model anyway. She's got no one, no family, no friends...it's just so sad." Pyrrha hid her face in her hands and took a few deep breaths. When she looked up she managed a smile, though her eyes were still watery. "I shouldn't talk about patients. What have you guys been up to today?"

"Nora's almost done making the crib." Sun replied.

"Are you being careful?" Pyrrha pressed. "All those woodworking tools look terrifyingly dangerous."

"Of course I'm being careful." Nora insisted. She patted her bulging belly. "I've gotta' for this little one."

"She wears gloves and safety goggles and everything." Sun added. "The other day Sage said he's never seen anyone as careful as her."

"And I cleaned his tools when I finished with them." Nora noted. "I'm the responsible one now, remember?" The others looked at her. "God, I hate being the responsible one."

"Whaddaya' say we eat before this stuff gets cold?" Sun held up the bag of Mistrali takeout.

"Yes, of course." Pyrrha nodded. "I'm starving."

"Me too." Nora agreed. "Carpentry really works up an appetite." Sun passed a series of containers, complete meals with sides, to Nora and Pyrrha as they gathered around the desk. Then he pulled a single small container for himself, just some noodles, and began eating.

"That's all you're going to have?" Pyrrha asked.

"I've got three classes to teach today." Sun explained. "If I eat too much I'll end up making myself sick. I'm already asking Sage and Scarlett to do more around the gym, it would be awkward to ask them to clean up my puke too."
"Good point." Nora allowed. "Just make sure you're eating enough. You don't wanna' pass out either."

"Yes mom." Sun rolled his eyes.

"I appreciate the sacrifices you're making for us." Pyrrha said after chewing and swallowing a forkful of her meal. "And I appreciate Sage and Scarlett picking up the slack. I know it has to be hard on all of you."

"Nah, it's alright." Sun chuckled. "Those guys've been slacking for years. It's about time they pulled their weight. It's nice to have a life outside the gym for once."

"Shame you have to spend it taking care of a pair of hormonal, pregnant ladies." Nora joked. "But don't worry, the new, boring me will be gone soon enough. I hope."

"Eh, you guys are still fun to hang out with." Sun shrugged. "I won't miss giving foot rubs though."

"You think we're gonna' let you stop after the births?" Nora smirked. "Think again monkey boy."

The morning work routine for Pyrrha and Glynda had changed little over the years. They would both come in early, well before the first appointment, Pyrrha usually a bit earlier than Glynda, mostly to do paperwork and deal with insurance companies. There was always plenty to do, usually more than time allowed, as most insurance companies fought against making any payments until absolutely forced to do so. It helped that they could work together, often using a sort of good-cop/bad-cop routine of gentle persuasion and threats of litigation to get the insurance companies to pay up.

Glynda sat at her desk, filling out one of the overly complex forms the insurance companies required from her. She was glad she had come in earlier than usual, as it was going to take quite some time. With a half hour before her first appointment, she might even have time for a cup of coffee. Her phone rang, not out of the ordinary, patients often called in the morning to make schedule changes. She was surprised when she saw who it was though. The name Polendina flashed on the screen. The man's daughter was Glynda's patient, a seven year old with autism and severe phobias. He never canceled or rescheduled one of his daughter Penny's appointments, and rarely called for any reason.

"Dr. Goodwitch." Glynda answered the phone.

"G-Glynda..." A strained girl's voice answered her.

"Penny?" Glynda was taken aback. She had often heard Penny in distress, and even received calls from her during anxiety attacks, but she had never sounded quite so scared, quite so desperate. "What's wrong?"

"Father...f-father won't wake up." Penny struggled. "I brought him his breakfast in bed like I do every day...but he was not awake. I let him sleep a little longer, but he will not get up." She was speaking quickly, something rare for her. Penny spoke like someone learning a second language - slowly and formally - though she only knew the one. She would only speak quickly when stressed.

"Penny...try to stay calm for me." Glynda instructed. "Did you call an ambulance?"

"Yes, and I told them where I live." Penny replied.

"That's good, you're doing a good job." Glynda encouraged. "The paramedics will be there soon. It's their job to help, so don't be afraid of them."
"I know I...I'm scared." Penny cried.

"That's okay." Glynda soothed. "I'm coming right over. Just try to stay calm. Use your breathing techniques."

"Is...is f-father going to be alright?" Penny asked.

Glynda had no answer. She wanted to say yes, but could not lie so blatantly. "I don't know." She got up and rushed out of her office. "Penny, when the ambulance arrives, let the paramedics in and show them to your father." Glynda waved to get Pyrrha's attention. "Penny, I'm going to hang up now, but you can call me again if you need to."

"O-okay." Penny managed.

Glynda hung up. "Pyrrha, something's happened to Penny's father. I'm heading over there. Cancel all today's appointments...unless you feel up to seeing your patients."

"Is he...is he okay?" Pyrrha asked.

"It doesn't sound good." Glynda admitted grimly. She hurried out and ran to her car.

The drive to the Polendina home was a short one, sped along by Glynda's aggressive driving. Sessions with Penny had revealed that she had no other family or friends. She loved her father, trusted Glynda, and was still unsure around even Pyrrha, whom she was well acquainted with. That was pretty much everyone in her life. Almost paradoxically, her phobias included a fear of new people, and a fear of being alone. Glynda needed to get to her fast, as those fears were now running in parallel.

Glynda had no trouble finding the Polendina house. It was in the middle of an upscale suburban block, surrounded by identical houses, but the only one with an ambulance and police car out front. She quickly got out of her car and walked across the carefully manicured lawn, reaching the front door just in time for it to open, and for the paramedics to wheel the stretched bearing Mr. Polendina out. He was completely covered.

A police officer followed just behind the paramedics. "Can I help you?" He asked.

Glynda gestured toward the ambulance, which the medics were just loading. "I'm Dr. Glynda Goodwitch. That man is...was the father of one of my patients, Penny. She called me..."

"Penny...you must mean the girl." The officer nodded. "We couldn't get her to tell us anything. She just showed us to the body and curled up on the couch. We brought a neighbor over to help but..."

"I need to-" Glynda started.

"Go ahead." The officer stepped aside and waved Glynda in.

Glynda had no trouble locating Penny. From the door she could see the girl hunched over, pressed back into the corner of the couch. Her hands covered her eyes and she rocked back and forth slightly. Beside Penny sat an older woman who looked bewildered and disturbed, presumably the neighbor. Penny had never mentioned her neighbors to Glynda, and she suspected they had never met before today. Glynda slowly approached the couch and crouched before Penny. Her breathing was unsteady, but followed a regular pattern. She was trying to utilize the breathing exercises Glynda had taught her, but they were clearly not helping.
Penny inhaled sharply and moved her hands away from one of her eyes. "G-Glynda!" Penny leapt forward and wrapped her arms around Glynda's neck, almost knocking her over. She was shaking.

Glynda stood, holding the girl in her arms and rubbing her back. "I'm here. It's going to be okay. I've got you." Penny launched back into her breathing exercises, with more success this time. With each breath she seemed to calm, if only a little. Glynda turned to the neighbor. "You can go. Thank you for being here."

The neighbor breathed a sigh of relief, got up and departed. Glynda sat down on the couch, Penny still hugging her tightly, holding on for dear life. She matched Penny's breathing, doing the exercises with her until her shaking stopped. Penny still clung to her, and Glynda was in no hurry to let go. After some time, Glynda became aware that the pair were not alone. She looked up to see the police officer patiently waiting nearby. "Can I speak with you?" The officer mouthed, adding hand gestures to get the point across.

"Alright." Penny sniffled. "I-I...I have to get you something." As soon as Glynda let go, Penny sprung up and raced up the stairs.

"Do you know how I can contact her family?" The officer asked once Penny was out of the room. "I checked the address book by the phone, but it seems to be all work-related."

"She and her father never mentioned any family to me." Glynda replied. "I know her mother died in childbirth, but that's all."

"She's not...uh...how can I put this...uh...normal, is she?" The officer struggled.

"She's autistic, and suffers from several severe phobias, among them a fear of strangers." Glynda confirmed.

"How did you know to come here?" The officer asked.

"She called me, right after calling the ambulance." Glynda answered. "As far as I know, I'm the only one other than her father that she fully trusts."

"That will...complicate matters." The officer sighed. "A social worker is on the way, but I don't want to put her through any unnecessary trauma."

"It seems there's not much choice." Glynda frowned. Looking past the officer, she saw Penny just peaking around the edge of the doorway. The officer followed her glance and looked, Penny retreating as soon as he did so. "Could you...give us a moment?"

"Sure." The officer nodded. "I'll wait outside." As soon as he was gone, Penny rushed in and again leapt into Glynda's lap, embracing her once more. There was something in her hand. "What do you have there?"

"FATHER said I sh-should give this to y-you if anything...i-if anything bad ever happened to him." Penny handed an envelope to Glynda, moving to sit beside her so she could read the contents.

Glynda opened the unsealed envelope that bore her name. Inside was a typewritten note. It read:

*Dr. Goodwitch,*
If you are reading this, it likely means I've passed away. I have been ill for some time, but I did not wish to worry you or Penny with that fact. You are the only person Penny has left. I place her in your care. I ask that you make sure she receives the care she needs, and that she finds a good home, with people she can trust and with whom she can live a happy life. I leave everything to Penny, and make you executor of my estate.

G. Polendina

Glynda sighed and looked to Penny. Of course her father would leave her in Glynda's care. There was just no one else. "Penny, I need to take this letter to the policeman. I'll be right back, okay?"

"Okay." Penny nodded.

Glynda stood and stepped outside, finding the officer sitting in his car. "You should read this." She handed him the letter.

The officer read the letter before passing it back. "In the absence of an official will, this is legally binding...though someone down at the courthouse will probably need to verify the signature. What do you intend to do about the girl?"

"I'm not entirely sure," Glynda admitted. "Finding Penny a family that can properly care for her won't be easy...allowing her to enter the foster system is unthinkable. For the time being, I'll take her into my care."

"I thought you might." The officer said. "You'll still need to talk things over with the social worker." He shook his head. "God, this is a rough situation."

Glynda sighed. "I've been a psychiatrist for about twenty years, and before that I was a teacher. I've seen a lot but this...this might be the most difficult situation I've faced."

"Well...I wish the both of you luck." The officer offered.

"Thank you." Glynda nodded. "I should get back to her."
Glynda remained with Penny for some time. The girl would occasionally slip into fits of sobbing, and Glynda did her best to soothe her. Together they practiced the calming techniques Glynda had been teaching Penny, and over time, it seemed to work. The social worker came and went. Given Penny's extraordinary situation, and her father's unofficial will, she was officially placed in Glynda's care, pending the necessary checks and reviews. Physically and emotionally drained, Penny managed to fall asleep for a short time, waking up in the late afternoon.

Penny climbed out of Glynda's lap and sat beside her on the couch. Rocking back and forth, she stared at the ground miserably. "Father...father is dead, isn't he?" She asked, almost whispering.

Glynda was taken aback. It was a heavy question to begin with, and she was not sure Penny grasped the concept of death. "He is." Glynda finally replied. "I'm sorry." They sat in silence for a few moments. Glynda watched Penny, but she seemed to have no reaction. That was hardly surprising, it was just confirmation of something she had already known. "Do you...know what that means?"

"Yes." Penny confirmed. "Father explained death to me. When someone dies, they go away, forever, and no one can see them or speak with them again. He said that one day he would die, that I would have to go on without him. He said not to worry, that it would not happen soon...but it did." Glynda put an arm around the girl's shoulders, and Penny leaned into her. "What will happen now? Do I have to live here alone? Do I have to live with someone new?"

"You don't have to be alone." Glynda assured her. "I'm not sure exactly what the future holds, but for now, I'll take care of you. Would you...like to come live with me?"

"Do I...I am afraid." Penny's smile faded.

"If you're too scared she can stay in her room, or you can stay in yours, at least until you're not so afraid anymore." Glynda encouraged. "Remember how scared you were when we first met? It took time, but you're not afraid of me anymore. Right?"

"Yes." Penny nodded. "But...father helped me stop being afraid."

"I'll help you stop being afraid." Glynda promised.

Penny was silent for a moment. "I will try. I need to try."

"Good, that's a good attitude to have." Glynda praised. "So you'll come home with me tonight?"

"Yes, I will." Penny confirmed.

"Alright." Glynda smiled, hoping her expression would further reassure Penny. "Why don't you go gather a few toys, some pajamas, and anything you need to sleep, just what you'll want for tonight. Tomorrow we can rent a moving van and come back to get more."
"Okay." Penny agreed. "But…" She fished around in her pocket before pulling out a few little pieces of metal. ".I broke my clip." She held out the bent and broken remains of the butterfly-style paperclip she toyed with almost constantly, flipping the arms back and forth. It had been a source of comfort and an outlet for nervous energy. The metallic *click-clack* accompanied Penny wherever she went. "When I was waiting for the ambulance, I squeezed it too hard, and it broke."

Glynda took the broken clip from Penny. The metal was bent and broken, certainly not repairable. "Why don't you use a fidget cube instead?" She suggested. Glynda reached into her purse and retrieved one of the toys. She kept several for patients to use, and had encouraged Penny to use one in lieu of her clip before. "If you don't like it, there are other kinds, or I could get you a new clip."

Penny took hold of the cube and began toying with the buttons and switches. She closed her eyes and managed a small smile. "This is...this is good."

"Wonderful." Glynda breathed a sigh of relief. "Alright, go gather your things. I have to make a phone call, but I'll come to your room as soon as I'm done."

"Okay." Penny nodded. She hopped off the couch and rushed up the stairs to her bedroom.

Glynda slipped her phone out of her pocket. It had been silenced since her arrival, and the missed calls and texts had piled up. She would get to them later. Swiping through her contacts, she found Raven and called. "Hey, what's up?" Raven answered.

"I've got an emergency and I need you to do me a few favors." Glynda replied.

"Yeah...of course." Raven responded. "What's going on, what do you need?"

"I'm bringing a patient home." Glynda explained. "I'll give you more details in person, but she has many phobias. I need you to clean up the guest room, make sure there's nothing in there that might be at all scary...the bed probably needs fresh sheets, and the room needs a dusting for sure."

"Yeah, I can do that." Raven said.

"And I need you to make yourself presentable." Glynda added. "Shower, put on some nice clothes, maybe makeup..."

"Why?" Raven asked.

"So you'll be less scary." Glynda replied. "And put your hair in a bun."

"Why a bun?" Raven pressed. "I hate putting my hair up."

"Because when your hair's down, you look like there's an eldritch abomination growing from your scalp." Glynda noted.

"You always liked it." Raven resisted.

"We're trying not to scare a little girl, who because of her phobias, will already be terrified of meeting you." Glynda admonished. "Just do it."

"Yeah, fine." Raven relented. "Anything else?"

"Oh, take down the painting in the living room, put it in the closet." Glynda remembered.

"It's just a forest." Raven observed. "Ruby painted it."
"It's kind of creepy, and I don't want to take any chances." Glynda insisted.

"Okay, is that all?" Raven asked.

"No, that should do it." Glynda answered. "I'll see you soon. Love you."

"I love you too." Raven declared before the pair hung up.

Glynda slipped the phone back into her pocket and took a deep breath. It had been a difficult day, and there were surely more difficult days ahead. Slowly, she walked up the stairs, following the sound to find Penny's room. When she arrived she found Penny sitting on the edge of her bed, with a piece of already packed luggage at her side. "Did you pack everything?" Glynda asked.

"Yes." Penny replied.

"What about your toothbrush and toothpaste?" Glynda pressed. Penny nodded. "Pillow?"

"And a blanket." Penny confirmed.

"Okay, good job." Glynda praised. "You've been very brave today, you're doing very good."

"Well." Penny corrected. "I'm doing well."

Glynda smiled. "Ah yes, my mistake. You're doing very well."

By the time Glynda and Penny departed the Polendina house, it was well into the evening. The summer sun had still yet to set, and still would not for some time, but it had been a long and exhausting day, during which neither had had anything to eat. Glynda offered to get Penny food from anywhere she chose. Penny picked a small pizzeria. On the way home from therapy sessions with Glynda, her father would stop there to get them lunch. To Penny, the place was inextricably linked with both Glynda and her father, making it the natural choice.

Penny remained in the car, watching a documentary on her tablet as Glynda entered the restaurant to order. Glynda soon returned with the food, a personal pizza for Penny - plain and light on the cheese - and a large pizza split half and half - extra cheese and bacon on one side, assorted meats on the other - for herself and Raven. From there it was a short drive to Glynda's home. It was a house not unlike Penny's, a cookie-cutter structure located in an affluent suburb on the outskirts of the city, different mostly in that it was but a single story tall.

Penny eyed the second car in the driveway with apprehension. "Your p-partner is here?"

"Yes, Raven is here." Glynda confirmed as she pulled the car to a stop. "She might be a little...intimidating, but try not to be afraid."

"I will try." Penny nodded.

Placing the pizzas atop the car, Glynda retrieved Penny's suitcase from the trunk. Once down on its wheels, Penny wheeled the luggage to the front door, waiting as Glynda approached with pizzas in one hand and keys in the other. After fumbling for a moment, Glynda managed to unlock the door and led Penny inside. "Let's get you to your room." Glynda suggested, figuring less contact with Raven would make the situation easier to handle for Penny. "You can eat there." Penny followed silently as Glynda walked through the living room, into a well-lit hallway beyond. "I hope you like it." She pointed to a door at the end of the hall. "That's the bathroom. My bedroom is to the right."
Just as Glynda reached for the doorknob to Penny's room, the door opened and Raven stepped out. Penny stared wide-eyed at Raven as she gazed back. "Uh...hi." Raven managed. Penny yelped and ducked behind Glynda, wrapping her arms around the woman's legs and hiding. Penny whimpered as Glynda and Raven stood face-to-face. "I...sorry?"

"Take the pizza." Glynda instructed, handing the large box to Raven. "Wait in our room." Raven nodded and rushed off down the hall. "Come on Penny, it's alright." Penny peeked from behind Glynda's legs, and seeing Raven disappear into the other bedroom, relaxed her grip and took a deep breath. "Sorry, I wasn't expecting her to still be in there."

"I-it is okay." Penny stammered.

"Let's get you settled." Glynda met her with a reassuring smile. She guided Penny into the room. To Raven's credit, the room was spotless, and the bed bore fresh sheets and pillowcases. The desk against the wall had been cleared of the cardboard boxes that previously cluttered its surface, and the various odds and ends that had been in the room where nowhere to be seen. After placing the pizza on the desk, Glynda lifted the suitcase onto the bed. "Why don't you start eating while I unpack for you?"

"Okay." Penny nodded. She sat at the desk, and after a few calming breaths, opened the box and went to work on her dinner.

Glynda slipped the tablet out of the front pocket of the luggage and set it aside. She then opened the suitcase to find it surprisingly well-ordered for one packed by a child. The toiletries were separate in one corner, toothbrush and toothpaste in a plastic bag. Beside them were neatly folded pajamas, for some reason featuring a race car design. The pillow and blanket separated those from a set of clean clothes identical to the ones Penny currently wore. At the very bottom were three unlabeled wooden boxes.

"What are these boxes?" Glynda asked.

"Those are my models, and tools." Penny turned around in the chair. "That box has the tools, that one is for the finished models, and that one is for the models I am still working on."

"Models...of course." Glynda nodded. Penny had told Glynda of her love of building and painting model cars. Her father had worked for a car company - now that Glynda thought about it, that probably explained the race car pajamas too - and had often brought home model kits from the company store. "Should I put these somewhere special or-"

"I can take care of them when I finish eating!" Penny cut in. "They're very fragile!"

"Okay, I'll just leave them on the bed." Glynda noted. She left the tablet, pillow, blanket and pajamas on the bed as well, and put the folded, clean clothes into a drawer. Picking up the toiletries, she headed for the door. "I'll be right back, but I need to do something first. I'm going to put these in the bathroom." Penny nodded, her mouth full of pizza. "I should get you something to drink...what do you want?"

Penny swallowed her mouthful. "I will have iced tea...if you have it."

"Okay, I'll get you a glass of iced tea." Glynda agreed. She headed out the door, dropped the toiletries off in the bathroom, then headed to her own bedroom, where she found Raven waiting, sitting on the bed beside the unopened pizza box. "Raven, are you alright?"

"I really blew it huh?" Raven smiled sadly. "The girl looked like she'd seen a monster."
"You do look rather...striking." Glynda noted. "Penny's very skittish in general, and after today, she's even more on edge."

"What happened?" Raven asked.

"Her father died." Glynda replied.

"Oh...why is she here?" Raven inquired.

"His will put her in my care." Glynda answered. Raven had no answer to that. "The will asked me to see to it that she finds a loving home, where her needs are taken care of. Right now that's here...but…"

"But what?" Raven pressed.

"I know it's sudden, and it might sound crazy, but I'm considering permanently adopting her." Glynda responded. "With your consent of course."

"I...uh...yeah..." Raven spluttered. "That's…"

"It's a lot, I know." Glynda sighed. "We don't have to decide right away, and I've not made a concrete decision. We'll take some time, think it over, talk about it, talk to Penny, then make our decision."

"Okay." Raven nodded, still in shock.

"I need to get back to her." Glynda noted. "Go ahead and eat your half of the pizza. I'll have mine later."

"Yeah, alright." Raven managed. Glynda hurried out, closing the door behind her. Raven sighed. "Holy shit."

After reheating and eating her own pizza, Glynda helped Penny unpack her model kits. Penny was wary at first, not wanting anyone else to handle them lest they do damage, but Glynda proved she had a soft touch and Penny relented. She went on to explain the various paints, glues and tools, before showing off some of the completed models to Glynda. Glynda was very impressed with the level of detail, right down to decals and paintwork. The kits were designed for adults, but Penny put them together with expert precision.

Penny worked on a model for a while as Glynda watched, then the pair lay down on the bed to watch a documentary Penny had on her tablet. Glynda noted the extensive library of educational material, mostly car related but extending to many different scientific fields. Penny chose a video about Nevermore cars, a luxury marque Glynda was vaguely familiar with. About a half hour in, Glynda was surprised to see Penny's father. He described the process of constructing engines for one of the company's high-end models. As Penny watched him, a smile spread across her face, and she looked about as happy as Glynda had ever seen her, but there was still a sadness in her eyes. She knew this would be as close as she would ever get to her father now.

"Your father built engines?" Glynda asked once the documentary was over.

"Yes, and designed them." Penny confirmed. "Once I was born, he mostly worked from home, but he would go to the factory sometimes to make sure they were making them properly. When he was younger, father built engines for the Nevermore Grand Prix Team."
Glynda was unfamiliar with motorsports, but even so, the Nevermore Grand Prix Team was known worldwide. "Wow, that's a famous team."

"Yes, and father was famous too." Penny nodded. "The team never gave him any trophies, but some of the drivers have him parts of their uniforms to thank him."

"Do you have any other videos with him in them?" Glynda asked.

"No." Penny shook her head.

"Not even interviews?" Glynda pressed. "Maybe we could search for some."

"No, father did not like being famous." Penny explained. "He told me he did not want to be on camera or talk to the press. He just wanted to live a quiet life with his family. He actually only agreed to be in that one documentary for me. It was a surprise for my birthday!"

"That's great." Glynda smiled. "I bet you were really excited."

"I was." Penny confirmed. "I could see him even when he had to go to work." Penny paused and her smile disappeared. "I can still see him now." She paused once more, clearly thinking hard. "Did he do that because he knew he would die?"

"I...hmm." Glynda sighed. "I don't think that's why. I think he just did it to make you happy."

"Oh, okay." Penny managed to smile once more. "It worked!"

"Good, whenever you're feeling sad, or alone, remember that." Glynda advised.

"Will you make a video for me?" Penny asked.

"I don't know, I'm not really famous or anything." Glynda noted.

"I do not care." Penny declared. "If I had a video of you, I could see you and hear you even when you are not around. It would make me happy like father's video."

Glynda thought for a moment. "I guess I could record a video for you. I'm not sure what I'd say or anything, but I can give it a try."
In the morning Glynda fired off texts to everyone to let them know what was going on with Penny. Then she and Penny got in the car and returned to the Polendina house. Raven arrived behind them, waiting in the rented moving van while Glynda and Penny went through the house, Penny pointing out things she wanted to take with her. Glynda would pass the information along to Raven, who would then do the heavy lifting. Penny did not ask to bring much other than the obvious - her clothes and toys - only requesting they take a few photographs of her and her father.

Glynda wondered what to do with Mr. Polendina's possessions. She asked Penny, but the girl had no answers, not knowing what to do. Penny could not decide if she wanted to keep the house either. The only thing she was sure she could part with was her father's car, an older but immaculately kept luxury Nevermore sedan. Everything else seemed to have at least a little sentimental value to Penny, and Glynda found it curious that with her love of cars, Penny did not care what was done with it.

The tour of the house eventually arrived at the garage. Inside, Penny's father kept an impressive collection of tools, everything one could conceivably need to work on a Nevermore. But that was not what drew her attention. In the center of the space sat a classic sports car. It was obviously not driveable, being up on jack-stands with the wire wheels removed, the hood up with the engine partially disassembled. "Was your father restoring this car?" Glynda asked.

"No," Penny shook her head. "Father...father was going to rebuild it with me...when I was old enough."

"I don't really know anything about cars, but I bet you could learn to do it yourself one day." Glynda encouraged.

"Maybe." Penny shrugged. "It won't be the same without him."

"I know." Glynda sighed. "I think he would want you to do it though." Glynda paused, looking the car over. It was clearly decades old, though she did not know exactly. Still, the bright red paint was a vibrant as the day it was built, and there seemed to be no major damage. A cursory glance did not detect any rust either. The car's smooth curves were interrupted by the odd ding or dent, but there was nothing worse than what would be caused by normal, everyday driving. "It's a beautiful car."

"It is a Nevermore 250 GTH." Penny noted. "Father got it when he first started working for the Grand Prix Team. He never drove it, and it had not been driven for many years before that. He said it was already a classic by the time he got it, and he did not want to risk damaging it. When I was born, he decided he would give it to me, so I could enjoy it too."

"How about this Penny?" Glynda started. "After we move your stuff out, we'll keep the house just like it is. Then you can decide what to do with everything when you're older."

"That sounds good." Penny agreed.

"Now, why don't you go wait in my car and watch a video?" Glynda suggested, handing over her keys. "I'll get Raven and show her what you want to take with us."
alone with the body before the public wake started. Glynda worried Penny would react hysterically, but she was surprisingly composed. She approached her father, looked at him for a while, and mumbled a few words. Then with tears in her eyes, she returned to Glynda's side. It had gone far better than expected.

There was still the second matter. Glynda had to settle the legal side of the situation, and that meant leaving Penny at home for the first time. Glynda did not think it was a good idea to leave Penny alone with Raven. The girl was still quite afraid of her, and given Penny's fragile state after seeing her father for the last time, Glynda decided she could not leave her without support. So on the way back from the wake, Glynda picked up Pyrrha. Penny knew Pyrrha, and while she was still wary around her, Pyrrha had the skills to support Penny should the need arise. Glynda also hoped Pyrrha could act as a sort of intermediary, helping to connect Penny and Raven.

Pyrrha held Penny's hand as the pair walked from the car to the house. Penny looked back and Glynda waved as she departed, on her way to meet with Winter and a lawyer to settle the Polendina estate. Glynda hoped to also start the process of permanently adopting Penny, though she and Raven still needed to have a more detailed conversation about that.

Pyrrha knocked on the door, and Penny preemptively moved behind her leg, hiding before Raven could open it. Seeing Penny's continued fear, Raven sighed, backing away so Pyrrha could lead Penny inside without further stress. Raven sat in a chair in the living room, knowing a day of discomfort for all was ahead. Pyrrha led Penny in, and the pair sat on the couch, Penny sinking back as best she could to be out of Raven's view. Pyrrha suggested they watch a video, and connected Penny's tablet to the television so they could watch on the big screen.

Raven had hoped that watching videos with Penny would be a way to bond with her. It was not to be. Pyrrha conversed with Penny about the content of the scientific documentary, but the topics were mostly over Raven's head. When she did attempt to make a comment, Penny responded badly, clinging to Pyrrha and shrinking away. The trio watched a few documentaries, but it only took one for Raven to give up on using them as a way to get closer to Penny.

After watching documentaries for a time, Penny decided she wanted to work on her models. Pyrrha joined her to watch, and insisted Raven do so as well. It was another bust for Raven. She knew nothing about cars, and there was no prospect of her helping Penny work on the models. The little pieces were too fiddly and fragile for her, and her painting skills were nonexistent. The only other hobby Penny appeared to have was reading. Raven figured she could read to Penny, but the girl would have to stop being terrified by her first.

When Glynda got home, Penny rushed to hug her, clinging to her desperately. She had had a rough day, one of pain and fear, and Glynda's presence was the greatest comfort she could imagine. Glynda brought dinner with her, and she ate with Penny in her room while Raven ate in the kitchen alone. It had been a bad day to say the least. The next day looked as though it would be even more trying. Glynda and Pyrrha would be attending Mr. Polendina's funeral, leaving Penny alone at home with Raven. Glynda had hoped Raven and Penny would make progress before then, but Penny remained just as anxious around Raven as she had been the prior day. It was going to be rough, and Raven knew it.

The day went about as poorly as Raven had expected. As soon as Glynda left for the funeral, Penny retreated to her room. Raven softly knocked on the door and asked to be admitted, but Penny refused. All Raven could do for the next several hours was to sit in the living room wondering where she had gone wrong. She did occasionally check on Penny, knocking and asking if she was alright or if she needed anything. Penny did manage to answer calmly, but the anxiety was always clear in
Penny may not have been as terrified of Raven as she had been when they had first met, but the fear was still there, and still real. Glynda was already planning to return to work the next week. If the situation did not improve, well, Raven was not sure what would happen, just that it would not be good. It was not healthy for Penny to spend her days cowering in fear. With Glynda preoccupied, Raven turned to the one other person she trusted for advice when it mattered most: Yang.

"Well, I like the new hairdo." Yang shrugged. "It makes you look...less homeless."

"Yeah, well I hate it." Raven grumbled. She snapped a few building blocks together and passed them to Summer so she could add the cluster to the larger set. "She's still afraid of me anyway."

"Well, you are kinda' scary." Yang noted.

"How so?" Raven asked.

"Well, the sickly pale skin, the dark circles under your eyes, the way you look kinda' malnourished." Yang replied.

"You look like a vampire." Summer giggled, completing the next step of building the set.

Raven groaned and buried her face in her hands, resting her elbows on the table. "Maybe I should cut my hair? Makeup would probably help the rest, but I don't know. Would it even matter?"

"What do you mean?" Yang asked. "Is your terrifying appearance not enough of a problem?"

"Glynda thinks Penny would get used to me if we just had some way to bond, but I've got nothing." Raven explained.

"What does Penny like to do?" Summer asked. Yang passed her another cluster of blocks to add to the main structure.

"Well, she mostly watches documentaries." Raven answered. "They're way too smart for me. Other than that, she builds model cars. I'm talking super-detailed models intended for adults. All those little pieces...the glue...the paint...I'm not just afraid I'd screw it up, I know I'd screw it up. And Penny's really protective of them. If I messed it up, she'd probably freak out."

"Why don't you try these?" Summer suggested, pointing to the plastic snap-together blocks that were spread across the table. "They're easy to build, and fun, and if you make a mistake, you can just pull it apart and fix it!"

Raven sat in silence for a moment, staring blankly at Summer, who just smiled back. "Yang, the kid's a genius."

"I think it's probably more that we're a bunch of idiots, and she looks brilliant by comparison, but yeah, she is." Yang joked. "I've got some extra sets you can have. Got some doubles...and triples. My memory isn't great and Winter buys them for us too."

"It's definitely worth a shot." Raven agreed. "If it doesn't work...well, I guess I could suffer through being treated like a monster for the rest of my life."

"Rest of your life?" Yang asked. "I thought it was a temporary adoption."

"It is for now." Raven noted. "But Glynda's got a soft spot for Penny...I'm not just here to complain..."
and drink your booze."

"You wouldn't know it by looking..." Yang teased.

"Anyway, I wanted to ask your permission before we adopted." Raven continued. "To make sure it's alright with you. I can't say no to Glynda...I could, but I can't, ya' know?"

"You don't need my permission." Yang scoffed.

"Yes, I do."

"Of course I'm okay with it." Yang declared. "How many times do I have to tell you? All is forgiven. I just want you to be happy, the way you want me to be happy. If that means adopting a kid, great. I love being Aunty Yang. Besides, this one sounds like a real handful. That'll make up for all those years you got out of dealing with my crap. I had a rebellious phase you know."

"It never ended." Winter deadpanned, arriving at the table with a tray of drinks.

"Well, that's a load of my chest..." Raven chuckled, running a hand over her face. "If this building block thing works I'll really be in business."

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Glynda cleaned up the kitchen after dinner. She had made fried chicken, so there was a bit of a mess to deal with. Penny sat on the couch, watching some kind of car show on television. It seemed when she was not watching something on her tablet for working on models, she was watching something educational on television. She apparently had no interest in cartoons or normal children's television, and certainly no patience for sitcoms.

Raven approached slowly, plastic shopping bag in hand. "Penny." She called out softly so as not to startle her. Penny looked over with obvious anxiety written across her face, but she did not flee as she sometimes did when Raven approached. Glynda had asked her to try with Raven, and so Penny was determined to at least give it a shot. Raven reached into the bag and produced a small box, placing it on the couch near Penny. "I know you like cars, and building stuff, but your models are too complicated for me and...well, I was hoping you'd like this."

Penny glanced at the box while trying not to take her eyes off of Raven. It was a snap-together plastic block kit of a racecar. Raven sat at the far end of the coffee table and pulled an identical kit out of her bag. Preposterously, Yang had been in possession of four identical kits. Raven opened it up and poured the contents onto the table. She opened the instruction book and started building. Penny watched for a few minutes, then took her own kit and sat at the opposite end of the coffee table. Penny set about constructing it, and soon her nervous glances at Raven ceased, replaced by total focus on the task at hand.

Penny completed her kit first, pressed the blocky driver into the cockpit and rolled the car around a bit. Raven finished hers and slid the car across the table toward Penny. As the car rolled to a stop, Penny looked up at a smiling Raven, and managed to return a hesitant smile herself before rolling the car back. "I uh...have a bigger kit too." Raven spoke up. She pulled a large box out of the bag, a colorful block garage depicted on it. "I'm kinda' dumb, and I was hoping you could help me."

Penny hesitated for a moment, but shifted closer to Raven, moving around to the long side of the table. Raven slowly started to do the same, waiting for Penny's reaction. Penny did not protest or shrink away, so Raven moved to sit beside her, not too close, but close enough that they could work
together on the kit. Raven breathed a sigh of relief. Out of sight, watching from a discreet distance away, Glynda silently cheered.

Winter sat at her desk, typing away at her computer. Normally her office would have been filled with music, but today it was silent, bar the clicking keys. She was behind on paperwork and needed absolute focus. It was an odd position to be in. Running a business could be a lot of work, but Winter generally had no trouble. She had trained her whole life for this sort of thing. Filling out trademark forms was second nature, and she could file taxes in her sleep. She had taken a few days off to help Glynda with her situation, and the work had piled up. Now Winter tore through the backlog. She would be back on schedule in no time.

There was a knock at the office door. "Come in." Winter called without looking up. She finished filling out the current form before turning her attention to the visitor. It was Melanie, looking as bored as ever. "What can I do for you?"

"I need to change my address." Melanie replied.

"Sure, just a second." Winter pulled up Melanie's file. "What's the new address?" Melanie handed Winter a paper with the address written on it. Winter duly entered the new information and saved the changes. "Patch? That's a bit of a commute."

"It's not too bad." Melanie shrugged. "It's right by the ferry."

"Good, good." Winter smiled. "Still a strange place to move though."

"I moved in with my boyfriend." Melanie explained.

"A boyfriend huh?" Winter asked. "Anyone I know?"

"Yep." Melanie replied.

Winter had already started working on another form as she talked, but came to a grinding halt. "Wait...Patch...someone I know...oh for the love of..." Winter sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. "Tell me it's not Qrow."

"It's not Qrow." Melanie lied with an amused expression.

Winter stared at Melanie until her grin faded into her usual bored look. "Is there anything else?"

"Nope." Melanie replied. "See ya."

Winter watched from her desk as Melanie left the room. She just sat there for a few minutes before calling Yang over the PA. There was soon a knock at the door. "Come in." Winter called.

Yang entered the room, closing the door behind her. "What's up?"

"I had an interesting talk with Melanie just now." Winter noted.

"I didn't do it!" Yang preemptively defended.

"She's dating Qrow." Winter groaned. "She's living with him already."

"Oh, that." Yang shrugged. "They've been doin' pretty great."

"You know?!" Winter demanded.
"Yeah, Qrow called me." Yang confirmed. "He asked me not to tell you...oh..."

"Yang, I want you to call up your uncle, and tell him that if he does anything untoward to Melanie, I will have him killed." Winter growled. "And that's not a threat. It's a promise."

"It's kind of a waste." Yang chuckled. "Qrow's way more afraid of Mel than he would be of any professional assassin."

"What do you mean?" Winter asked.

"Mel threatened to cut off his balls and feed them to him if he did anything untoward." Yang explained.

"Oh, alright then." Winter nodded. She looked up at Yang, smirking. "This Melanie girl, I like her."
When Blake and Velvet informed Kali of their intent to further pursue adoption, she was ecstatic. It was entertaining watching the elder woman bounce around, like a child told she was going to the circus, or waiting for the candy store to open, babbling about how wonderful it would be to visit so many children, and how sad it would be that they could not adopt all of them. It honestly worried Blake. What if Kali grew too attached? What if they could not find someone as comfortable with them as Summer? It was not even fair to think that way. It was not a competition, Summer was not a standard to be surpassed. But they were so enamored with the girl, it was difficult to resist. They wanted someone who could love them as much as they were loved, and that was a tall order by any stretch of the imagination.

Kali's enthusiasm refused to wane, intensifying as they headed to their first chosen orphanage, or rather, the first on their list that they had not visited already. "Ooh, I can't wait to see their smiles!" Kali squealed excitedly.

Blake rolled her eyes, but she and Velvet both wore amused expressions. At the very least Kali helped soothe the nerves. Blake always felt placed on a pedestal during her visits, with every child silently asking 'will you be my new mummy?' It was intimidating, and sad, so many little eyes would be filled with disappointment, and there was nothing she could feasibly do about it. "We're nearly there, just wait a tad longer." Blake teased.

A little later, they arrived, and Kali barely controlled herself long enough to greet the caretaker, and be introduced to the children. At first the caretaker - Ebony - was put off by her enthusiasm, until Blake and Velvet explained her occupation and love of children, and so Kali found herself in charge of an entire playroom full of bubbly orphans, all crowding around her for attention, attention given freely. The last sight Blake caught of her mother before heading into a side room was a borderline dogpile. With the majority of the children taken care of, they were free to begin one on one interviews.

Blake and Velvet awaited the arrival of their first prospective adoptee, a young girl of six named Shirley. She was incredibly shy, with auburn hair so tangled with curls she could scarcely see through it. Timid though she may be, Blake and Velvet were able to glean some aspects of her personality. She loved to play tag, had a bad habit of tripping - showing off a freshly bandaged knee - and wanted to be a doctor when she grew up. Shirley spent the majority of the interview blushing and hiding behind her curls. It would have been endearing if it did not make Blake think so much more fondly of Summer, whose steadfast eye contact through their every interaction always impressed her, coming from such a young girl. No, this one just did not feel right, a hard admittance Blake was thankful not to have to utter to her face. The girl would find a wonderful home one day, but not today.

Still, Blake and Velvet escorted Shirley back to the playroom hand-in-hand. It was the least they could do for the unintentionally cruelty Blake felt herself inflicting. She must have inherited a heavy heart from her mother, she thought as she passed through the doorway. Kali was conducting a game of hopscotch, a plastic tarp laid out for the children to hop on, as their peers sung rhymes to a steady beat. Kali shot a bright smile to Blake and Velvet as they left with another child, a boy this time, and one of the few not participating in the game.

Theodore was silent on the way to the interview room, and remained so as they sat down. He seemed tired, mumbling answers to their questions. He looked right through them, a disturbing
contrast to the prior girl, as if he was not really seeing anything at all. When asked if he was alright, he nodded sleepily, then leaned forward and fell asleep on the table. Ebony entered in a hurry, checking on him and sighing in frustration. She apologized for not being observant beforehand.

Blake asked if he had taken medication, or been sniffing glue. Ebony could only smile apologetically, Theodore had strange habits.

A little dismayed, Blake and Velvet returned to the playroom while Ebony handled the boy, only to be met with a relatively calm atmosphere. The children were playing in their own little groups, and Kali? It took them a while to spot her, sitting half-hidden beside some desks in the corner, seemingly dozing with a head of vibrant cyan hair in her lap, which she stroked gently. The body the head belonged to was hidden beneath the desks, and her face was hidden from view, buried in Kali's kimono. As they approached, Kali opened her eyes, and raised her free hand to her lips, signaling them to be quiet. She looked deeply troubled, even as Blake and Velvet sat beside her. She opened her mouth to say something several times, but no sound came out. Her lips pulled into a thin line, face screwed up in an effort to swallow what emotion threatened to burst forth.

Ebony returned shortly thereafter, stopping to stare in shock before approaching. "Did she say anything?" Ebony asked.

Kali nodded and the girl stirred, murmuring and turning to look up at Kali, who plastered on a warm smile. "Hey sweetie, how are you feeling? Better?" She asked in a caring whisper. The girl groaned and hid herself in Kali's skirt again, but did not shrug off Kali's hand. "Would you like to go back to your room? It would be quieter, more peaceful." The girl merely shrugged, and Kali swallowed. "Come on dear, I'll come with you." She patted the girl's head, and with a huff, she slowly moved to sit up. Tired green eyes flickered between Blake and Velvet, before moving away as she pushed herself to her feet.

Electing to grant them some privacy, Blake, Velvet and Ebony waited several minutes for Kali to slowly emerge, gently closing the door behind her. Blake approached her mother only to be pulled into a tight embrace, catching her off guard until the first sob came, muffled by her blouse. Blake quickly returned the embrace as the older woman broke down in her arms. She knew something like this would happen, and yet she was completely unprepared for it.

Reese Chloris - four years old, orphaned not two months prior, parents the victims of tainted drugs. None of her few relatives had been willing to take her in, and so the confused and scared girl had been placed in an orphanage, barely able to comprehend the magnitude of what had happened to her life. Everything was gone, the bare minimum of support was afforded to her by the government. The handling of the case infuriated Blake, baffled Velvet and pained Kali deeply.

"She was hiding under the tables, so I didn't see her at first." Kali recounted when she calmed. They had since retreated to Ebony's office, where they were given Reese's file. "I told the children to keep playing and I tried to speak with her, to see what was wrong, but she was a stubborn one. She ignored me, then told me to go away...I said I wanted to help, and she told me I couldn't help. Her parents were gone, and she didn't know where, but everyone said they weren't coming back, and that she was going to a new family. But she doesn't want a new family, she wants her real family back. She doesn't understand. She's just so lost. She needs help. Why hasn't she received it?" Her voice
was stern in spite of her grief.

Ebony sighed. "We have a lot of children Mrs. Belladonna, and our funding only takes us so far. Occasionally we receive extra charity support, but when it comes to allocating funds, repairs and resources are a higher priority than counselling. I had hoped Reese would come to terms given time and space, but it doesn't seem to be working. She hides away, when she's not sleeping or crying. You're the first person she's interacted with outside of staff, and the only potential adopter."

The trio mulled the information over, considering their next course of action. Kali spoke first. "We need to discuss this in private."

Ebony nodded and stood. "Take as long as you need. I'll be with the children." She left the room, shutting the door behind her.

Kali deflated, burying her face in her hands. Blake lay a hand on her shoulder. "I can't leave her like this." Kali insisted. "That girl needs proper care. I'll sponsor her, adopt her myself if she allows it."

Blake exchanged a look with Velvet. "Do you think she'll meet with us?"

"I...don't know, sweetie." Kali sighed. "You don't have to consider this just because of me."

"But we are." Velvet noted. "We're not just...shopping for a child. We're looking to give someone a second chance in life. Maybe Reese needs that."

"Are you sure?" Kali pressed. "I don't know how she'll react. She might not accept you, or talk to you at all."

"She accepts you, that's a start." Blake suggested.

"And we can go from there." Velvet added.

"Are you sure-" Kali started.

"Mom, come on, she can't be worse than the last kid." Blake cut in. "He literally passed out in front of us."

After discussing the situation with Ebony, the trio agreed to return the next day. Kali met with Reese first, in her room, where she would be the most comfortable. After a few minutes, Kali opened the door and beckoned Blake and Velvet in, shutting the door behind them. Reese sat huddled in the corner of her bunk. Blake and Velvet stood there awkwardly as Kali sat near the shy girl.

"Reese, this is my daughter Blake, and her wife Velvet." Kali introduced. She nodded toward the neighboring bed and the two sat, ducking beneath the upper bunk.

Reese started at them blankly. "Hi."

"Hi." Blake greeted.

"Hey." Velvet offered a smile.

"Don't be afraid." Kali encouraged with a gentle smile. "You can ask anything you like."

Reese's gaze flickered between the three, quick and nervous. "You wanna' take me away?"

"We want to give you a home." Velvet declared.
"I have a home...I wanna' go back." Reese insisted.

"We know...but you can't." Blake sighed.

"I don't care." Reese snapped. "I miss my house, I miss my bed, I miss my mommy and daddy. Why can't they come back? Why do I gotta' be here?"

"Because sweetie, mommy and daddy have passed on." Kali replied.

"Whadda' you mean?" Reese pleaded. "I don't understand. Why did they leave? Why can't they come back?"

"Because they're not here anymore sweetie." Kali continued. "The Maidens took them to heaven. You know about heaven don't you?"

Reese shook her head, trembling. Kali moved closer, sitting beside her. She looked across to Blake. "Blake, do you remember how I taught you?"

It had been a very long time since Kali had taught Blake, the memories were fuzzy, but scripture and pop culture had burned the tale into her mind. "God and his Maidens created our world, and with it the heavens. Eventually, there comes a time when we stop living on this world, and rise up to join them in paradise." Blake recounted, smiling as Kali beamed at her.

"That's where your parents are." Kali took over for Blake. "They lived here as long as they could, and now they've passed on, and they're in heaven. Do you understand?"

Reese trembled as she nodded. "Can't I go see them?"

"Someday sweetie, but not for a long time." Kali explained. "I'll see them before you do. And I promise, I'll visit them for you, and tell them all about you."

"You will?" Reese asked.

"I promise, but I want to be able to tell them I've helped you." Kali continued. "Mommy and daddy want you to be safe and happy. You don't feel happy here, isn't that right?"

"No...I hate it here...it's too loud and there's too many people, and they keep asking me why I'm sad and I just wanna' be left alone." Reese answered.

"We won't force you to come with us Reese." Velvet noted. "But if you do you'll have your own room, and all the time alone you need. We just want to help."

"We all do, if you'll let us." Blake added.

"We can't replace your family Reese, but you can join ours, whenever you want to." Kali offered.

"A-and mommy and daddy will be happy?" Reese asked.

"Yes sweetie, I promise." Kali nodded.

"Pinky promise?" Reese held up a shaky hand, pinky extended. "Mommy and daddy didn't pinky promise to come back, and you need to pinky promise!"

Kali smiled sadly, raising her own pinky to curl around Reese's, and squeezing. "I pinky promise Reese. As long as you're happy, mommy and daddy will be happy, and we'll do everything we can to make you happy again, okay?"
"Okay...do I have to call you moms?" Reese asked, looking to Blake and Velvet.

"No Reese, not unless you want to." Blake shook her head. "You can just call us Blake and Velvet if you like."

"Alright...o-okay...what now?" Reese asked.

"Now, boring adult stuff." Kali replied. "But we'll have you out of here soon, okay?"

"Promise?" Reese pressed.

Kali smiled. "Pinky promise."

It was not the sort of restaurant they would normally have visited, but the pregnant ladies got to decide, and they chose a gimmicky burger restaurant that specialized in mixing odd ingredients into their meat. Winter was content with a salad, but everyone else - Yang, Sun, Nora, Pyrrha, Blake, Velvet and Melanie - all chose to have some sort of strange burger. The tastes were...interesting to say the least. At least the fries were good, and Nora was more than happy to vacuum up anything the others were unable to finish.

"Fish was a poor choice." Blake groaned. Not only had it not been particularly palatable, but now her burger was churning up her stomach.

"Hot Sauce and Cheese Explosion...tasted great, but I regret everything." Yang grimaced.

"The Carrot and Kale Veggie was pretty good." Velvet observed. "It didn't have much taste, but that's better than bad taste, right?"

"I'm never coming here again." Melanie grumbled. She had barely eaten a quarter of her plain burger.

"But it's so good!" Nora insisted, clearly finding herself in the minority.

"It was okay." Pyrrha allowed. "But I can see why it's not for everyone."

"You guys need to cut it out with the pregnancy cravings." Sun complained. "You're going to kill us all."

"I quite enjoyed my meal." Winter smiled smugly. Her decision to skip a burger had originally been derided as cowardly. Now it appeared that discretion had been the better part of valor.

"Wanna' come back tomorrow Pyrrha?" Nora asked.

"No...but yes." Pyrrha sighed.

"So, how does the future of Solstice look?" Sun changed the subject.

"There won't be a future if you don't stop knocking up my employees." Winter teased.

"Sorry for being so potent." Sun rolled his eyes.

"I'm tellin' you, future employees." Nora suggested.

"With those genes they're bound to be comic book superhumans." Velvet joked.
"We'll talk about it...in 20 years." Winter smirked. "Anyway, we've got a company car now. Glynda sold me the one she...inherited. I suppose Melanie would need it most, given your current living situation." Winter sighed, shaking her head. "You can use if for your commute if you like."

"Can I get reimbursed for the gas?" Melanie asked.

"Yes, but only if you smack Qrow for me." Winter replied. "Film it."

"Done." Melanie agreed.

"So...you're dating my uncle...go on any actual dates yet?" Yang asked.

"One." Melanie answered. There was a silence as the others waited for her to elaborate, but no further information was forthcoming.

"Care to tell us about it?" Blake finally pressed.

"Not really" Melanie deadpanned.

"Come on, please." Nora insisted.

"Fine." Melanie huffed. "We went to the gun range."

"That's...different." Velvet noted.

"It was alright." Melanie shrugged. "Qrow went through this whole speech about needing to know how to defend myself, and being familiar with weapons. I know how to shoot a gun. I also know how to kick the shit out of someone."

"You've fired a gun before?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, who hasn't?" Melanie answered.

Nora, Pyrrha and Winter raised their hands. "Shit Winter, really?" Yang chuckled. "I need to take you to the range. Shooting is fun."

"I'm not going on a date inspired by your uncle." Winter grumbled.

"I'll go...after I give birth of course." Pyrrha offered. The others stared at her in shock. "What? It sounds like fun...and I want to try new things."

"Can I go too?!" Nora squealed.

"No." Sun flatly forbid it. "There's no way anyone would ever let you near a firearm."

"But I'm all careful and responsible now." Nora whined.

"We'll see if that sticks after the kid pops out." Sun countered.

"Anyway...Mel, after your date...you get lucky?" Yang smirked.

"Nope." Melanie replied. "Unless you consider snuggling and watching a movie getting lucky. We haven't done anything more than that."

"That does sound nice." Winter thought aloud.

"Really?" Yang tilted her head. "I thought ol' Qrow would've been chomping at the bit. Guess he's
"Can we talk about something else?" Winter sighed.

"Fine." Yang rolled her eyes. "How's the adoption thing going Blakey?"

"We think we found the one." Blake replied. "We're just waiting for the paperwork to go through."

"This one half as cute as Summer?" Yang asked.

"Reese is cute." Velvet answered. "She's not as bubbly, but given her situation, that's hardly surprising. It's going to take some time with her."

"She's not like Summer." Blake explained. "She _had_ a family, and she'd rather have them back then get a new one."

"She really connected with Kali though." Velvet added. "And we're hoping she'll do the same with us in time."

"If she needs counseling, I'm sure Glynda can find room in her schedule." Pyrrha offered.

"I don't really want to impose." Blake noted. "She's got a full plate as it is. We'll do what we can for now. Once you're back to work we'll look into counseling if we have to."

"Good luck." Yang smiled. "Hmm...I guess Kali won't be around to babysit much anymore."

"We could ask Yatsuhashi." Winter suggested. "I'm sure he'd like to spend time with his daughter, and Arslan tells me he's great with kids."

"He already spends all day at the orphanage, I don't think he wants to babysit in his spare time." Yang noted. "Besides, being around Summer might still be painful for him."

"I guess there's always Raven then." Winter sighed.

Blake smiled. "Don't worry, Summer's always gonna' be Kali's granddaughter."
"Bye Yang, byebye Summer!" Kali bid with a wave. "Be good!" She walked away from the car that had brought her home, heading for the apartment building before her. Looking after Summer was always such a delight, and this time she got to gush over Reese. Summer had, understandably, been worried she would not be able to come over often anymore, but Kali soothed her. Summer would always be welcome, she would just have a cousin to play with now! Her family was growing larger by the day, and sharing in her delight was one of the sweetest treats in the world.

Climbing up some stairs and walking down the hall, Kali used her key to enter her daughter's apartment. "I'm hooome!" She sang, closing and locking the door before taking off her sandals, stowing them on a nearby shoe rack.

"Mom?" Velvet called from the kitchen.

Kali perked up at Velvet's voice, both because she still found joy in Velvet addressing her as such, and because of the tone in which she said it. She sounded tense. "Velvet, dear, are you okay?" She asked as she entered the kitchen.

Velvet stood leaning against the counter, hands wringing, a worried look on her face. "I'm...fine, it's Blake. She...she gets in these moods sometimes. She gets really quiet and asks to be alone, and it's happened again and it's been ages since it last happened. I'm worried, I'm always worried. I don't know what to do. I'm just stuck here waiting for her to come out and say she's fine, but it never feels right."

Kali pulled her into a hug, Velvet melting into her arms as she shakily regained control over her breathing. "I know how it feels. It's been a habit of hers since her early teens. At first I allowed it, but over time I learned a better way to handle it." Kali grinned, pecking Velvet on the forehead before strolling off, turning down the short hallway until she stood in front of the bedroom door. "Kitten, mummy's home!" Kali knocked twice before opening the door, peeking in to find Blake sitting on her bed, an open book in her lap.

Blake looked up at her mother, letting out a small sigh before smiling faintly. "Hi mom, how was Summer?"

"Adorable, as always." Kali answered as she slipped into the room, walking over to join her daughter on the edge of the bed. "I told her about Reese. She's excited to have her first cousin! Watchya' lookin' at?" The book appeared to be a scrapbook, several instant photos and printed pictures adorned one page, but the other was completely blank.

Blake gazed at the page sadly. "I used to keep this when I was in school. My friends and I would take a bunch of pictures, and on weekends we'd sort through them, and put our favorites in here." She flipped back near the start, finding a specific page and pointing to a group selfie, Blake in the middle with four others flanking her. "Ollie, Sheena, Lillian and Saffy." Blake pointed them out from left to right. "Ollie went into vet science, Sheena joined the military, Lillian's a lawyer in Atlas, and Saffy...she passed away last year." Blake ended in a somber tone.

"Rest her soul." Kali prayed. "Do you still speak with them?"

"Yeah, actually." Blake nodded. "I got back in touch at Saffy's funeral...we chat every now and
then. I visit them when I'm nearby, but we'll never be as close as we used to be...it's too late for that."
She turned back to the final page. The pictures were more mundane, a bird, a shoreline, Blake's foot
with toes freshly painted, and a cluttered desk. Then nothing. "When I started using, I stopped
scraping. Things had been hard for a while. Ollie and Lillian were cramming, Sheena was out
partying more often than not. Saffy was all I really had left...we used to smoke together. It was fun,
we liked being together...we'd even fooled around a bit...and if things had kept going like that,
maybe nothing would have gone wrong. Maybe I'd be with Saffy, maybe I'd have graduated...but
then I met Adam...and shit went sideways..."

Blake closed the book, hugging it to her chest. Kali lay a hand on her back, a simple, warm reminder
of her presence, of her support. "Do you want to talk about him?" Kali murmured. Blake was silent
for a time, staring blankly at the wall in front of her, before finally nodding shakily. Kali moved
back, arranging the pillows more comfortably before patting the bed beside her. With a deep breath,
Blake joined her, accepting an arm around her shoulders and leaning into her mother's warmth.
"Whenever you're ready Kitten, at your pace."

After a long silence, Blake began. "Adam was...handsome, strong, intelligent and passionate. I'd
never met a man that made me feel so...allured before, ever. It was shocking. We met one night
because I was out of pot. I'd had a shit week, and my dealer wasn't picking up, and I didn't wanna'
ask anyone else for a hit, but I did ask if anyone knew another dealer...I call him, he says to meet him
in some back alley in half an hour. I showed up, some deal was already going on, then an argument
broke out. The guns came out and suddenly I'm in the middle of a shootout and I'm standing there
scared shitless.

"Then someone tackles me, everything goes quiet, I open my eyes and...it was like...time stood still
and...and he knew. He had this smirk like he knew he had me already because I was so out of it and
blushing and giggling at his flirting. He asked me what I needed the pot for, and I said it was to feel
better, escape from reality for a bit. He said he had something better, if I was up for it. And that's
how I first tried heroin. He said trust me, and I went right along with him, a lovestruck moron."

Kali felt her ire grow, lip curling in disgust at the tale. That her baby girl had been so easily taken
advantage of in the midst of her sexual confusion. But she swallowed any remark. This was about
Blake, and she refused to interrupt.

"He gave me weed, but it didn't do it anymore." Blake continued. "All I could think about was the
high, how good it felt running through my veins, how good it felt in his arms, the things we talked
about...everything seemed so dull after. So I called him again, and we shot up again...I shot up
again, he never did. He'd smoke, but the heroin was my vice, he just used it to take control of me,
and gradually pulled me away from everything I valued, until he was all that was left.

"Ollie and Lillian were pretty easy, our friendship was on the way out. He said friends were family,
and if family pulled away like that, they weren't real family anyway. Sheena too, she barely talked to
any of us, but Saffy?" Blake's voice grew thick. "I broke her heart mom. She kept asking to hang
out, but I said I didn't want to smoke anymore. I didn't, smoking meant nothing anymore. Adam said
she only wanted me because I paid for the pot, and I believed him...she cried once, she knew
something was going on. She even got the others to come with her, but I just ignored them until they
went away. I heard her sobbing as they led her away. And I felt nothing.

"She wouldn't understand, they wouldn't understand. Adam said so. People wouldn't approve of
us...when I told him what happened, he said I should stop bothering. I should come live with him,
be his, he could keep my happy, he could keep me safe..." Blake trembled, snuggling closer,
clutching the scrapbook tighter, more desperately. Kali tightened her grip, biting her lip to stifle a
sob.
"I...he was...I didn't realize what he was until he started taking me to gang meetings." Blake struggled. "I think he thought that I'd understand, that I'd support him, that I'd join and stand by his side as some twisted bride as he climbed the ranks, but it scared the shit out of me, seeing all these criminals, with tattoos and scars, who'd look at me like a piece of meat, and then we'd get home and I'd be shaking, and he'd tell me things like I needed to be stronger, he expected better of me...I just wanted to go home, but I couldn't, I was trapped, and scared as I was, I still loved him. He'd given me a new life right? He took care of me, he'd always take care of me, he promised, so I figured I'd take care of him. I'd become better, so I quit, which I think frightened him, because the heroin kept me happy, kept me complacent, kept me bound to him. Without it, he needed something else to keep me in line.

"So he took me to a meeting one night. Someone's girlfriend had cheated on them, with a member of a rival gang...a-and they beat her, with fists, and pipes, and a bat. I could hear her bones breaking...the day he died was the happiest day of my life, and the most terrifying...my life was over, I had nothing left, not even him. I panicked, I didn't know what to do and I almost killed myself. I just wanted to stop existing..." Blake whispered the last few words, her voice lifeless. She took a deep breath and wiped her eyes.

"But the police stopped me, and Glynda found me, and I met Velvet, and things got better." Blake went on. "It was just me and Velvet, with Pyrrha and Glynda, and they were so nice. I felt the happiest I had in years. After meetings Velvet would buy me some tea and we'd just walk and talk about anything. I started feeling normal again, and then Nora came, and Sun, and then Yang, and she'd come with us sometimes. I had a friend group. I was a real person with friends. I thought I was getting better, but the nightmares, just wouldn't, fucking, stop." Blake growled, her free hand clenching into a fist.

"I relapsed." Blake sighed. "I was so sick of feeling terrified at night, I just wanted to go to sleep numb again. I found a dealer and bought as much as I could...it wasn't much, enough for a couple nights maybe...but it didn't matter. I shot up, and it hit me so fucking hard I lost my mind. Here I was, more than a year sober, taking a dose I used to take daily...I don't remember anything after that, just waking up in the hospital with Yang and Velvet at my side."

Blake chuckled breathlessly. "Apparently I'd wandered into Yang's flat. She was in the shower and thought someone had broken in, tore a towel rack off the wall to use as a weapon, charged into the lounge naked. She looked at me, I looked at her, grinned and said, 'are those for me?'" Blake chuckled again, and Kali joined in, teary as she was. "Then I passed out on her couch. She found the heroin in my purse and called an ambulance, then called Velvet, and they spent the night by my side as they flushed my system, then held my hands when I freaked out because I'd just relapsed, nearly overdosed, and spent all my money, and rent was due next week and I was gonna' be fired for being a strung-out junkie."

Blake was laughing, but there was little cheer in her voice. "You know what happened next? Velv asked me to move in with her, and Yang offered to help. They didn't judge me, they didn't lecture me, they just listened and helped, for the first time since Adam, I wasn't alone when I went to sleep that night. I didn't even have a nightmare. Yang stayed the night too. She made us pancakes in the morning. They were the best damn pancakes I've ever had in my life."

"Better than mine?" Kali mock gasped.

"Way better." Blake confirmed. "Sorry mom, Yang was taught by the great Summer Rose Senior, pancake and cookie master." She laughed, genuinely this time.

"Upstaged...by an angel no less." Kali said dramatically. "I'm not sure if this is a dream or a
"I cried again that morning...a few times that week actually...Yang asked if I was interested in her." Blake flushed. Kali's jaw dropped. "I said yeah, we went on a date...it went...okay, but everything kept leading back to how sad and fucked up we were. Yang said it wasn't a good idea for us. We needed to be better people before we started playing with each other's hearts." Blake sniffled. "It hurt, a lot, we both cried, but she was right. We would have dragged each other down then...but the kiss was still amazing."

"Oh my God." Kali gasped.

"She never did stop being an insufferable flirt." Blake smiled. "In some ways that hurt, but I think it helped more than anything. Yang never treated me any different. She always loved me, she still does. That's something you'll always be able to count on. Yang's love is eternal, and unconditional...Velvet and I took our time to grow closer. We started sleeping in the same room, to help each other when the nightmares came. And eventually, we just slept in the same bed. It didn't take us long to take things to the next level.

"It's...shocking, how easy it's been, to just...be happy. Sometimes I wonder how things would have been if I said, 'shut up Yang, we both want this, let's try anyway.' But then I remember how everything turned out with Velvet, and I'm grateful. Everything has been perfect. Even our marriage was perfect. Winter and Yang helped set up the proposal, and the wedding...just...perfect. My life has been perfect...but I can never shake this...shadow. It's always there in my periphery, the back of my mind, and today it's just...what if I fuck up?"

"What?" Kali asked.

"Everything, anything, everything and anything." Blake sighed. "What if I-I hurt Velvet, what if I can't help Reese? What if someone from Adam's gang comes after me and I put everyone in danger? What if something just snaps one day and everything comes flooding back and I want to relapse again? Mom, I don't do life well. I've always just gotten by on the backs of others, the police, Glynda, Velvet and Yang. They all saved me from myself. Winter gave me a real career a-and she even paid for my education. I've been handed second chance after third chance and I just don't know if I deserve it. Now I'm adopting a child, whose parents died because of drugs. How will she feel when she finds out about me? What if it happens again? I'll be letting everyone down...I'll be letting you down, again."

"Blake...sweetie." Kali shifted, shuffling down until she could face her daughter properly. It broke her heart to see Blake so helpless, so scared and small. It was a crime that such a beautiful soul had ever been put through such torture, to doubt her own capability to live. She damned Adam to a thousand hells for his crime. "You could never disappoint me." Taking Blake's other hand, she clasped them together, planting a kiss on her knuckles. "The Maidens blessed me with your existence, and I will be forever thankful for that, and I am proud of you, no matter what happens, no matter how hard you fall, every time you get back up. I will remain proud of you. There is no shame in accepting help, that is what family is for.

"When you were gone, I wanted nothing more than to...to just not wake up in the morning. When it would storm I would stand outside and pray, begging the Maidens to strike me down with lightning to bring me back to you..." Kali's voice cracked, her vision blurred, but she still smiled. "Ghira never gave up on me, at my weakest he remained strong, and his strength gave me the will to go on, just as Glynda, and Velvet and Yang did for you. Every day we live as a source of pride Blake, every struggle we survive is a new strength, and you are strong beyond your years. No matter how weak you feel, you have survived that which would destroy a thousand lesser souls...and you returned to
me, making me more proud than I could ever have hoped to be. My baby girl, my Kitten, the strongest woman I've ever known.

Blake choked, even as she broke out in a bashful grin, huddling close to bury herself beneath her mother's chin once more. "I love you mom."

"I love you too Kitten." Kali responded. "I promise, you can do this. I'll help you every step of the way. You're gonna' be the best darn mother in the world, and I'm gonna' be the greatest grandma in the world, and I'll never give up on you, you hear me? Never. You're stuck with me, old baby crazy Kali as your father used to call me."

Blake burst into a fit of choked giggles, Kali breaking out herself, letting go of Blake's hands to wrap her arms once more around her daughter. It felt unbelievable, once again, after so much pain and struggle, to simply share joy with her daughter, her own daughter, alive and...as well as can be, in her arms. On this day, she truly felt the Maidens had heard her pleas. Those endless days of bruised knees, burning incense and spilled tears had not been for nought. Blake was here. Blake was safe. Blake was home.
Though still hesitant to leave Penny at home, Glynda had returned to work. She had a duty to Penny, but she also had a duty to her patients, and Raven seemed to be getting along with Penny well enough. Penny was still noticeably cautious around Raven, but at least they could sit comfortably in the same room without one or both being traumatized by the experience. Raven still felt uneasy about some aspects of taking care of Penny, but they were making good progress.

The building block kits had brought the pair together and opened new avenues in their relationship. Raven was still useless when it came to Penny's more complex models, but she enjoyed watching Penny work, and for her part the girl talked about them with an enthusiasm usually reserved for when she was explaining something to Glynda. The documentaries Penny enjoyed still usually vexed Raven, but she was at least able to pick up some points, at least enough to have a discussion.

Penny and Raven sat at the coffee table, a documentary Penny had seen many times playing on the television, though neither was really paying attention to it. They were constructing a large building block kit, an elaborate fire station complete with firetrucks and firemen. They had started working on it just after Glynda had left for work, and now, hours later, they were almost done. "Raven, can we have lunch?" Penny asked, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Oh...is it that time already?" Raven looked at the clock. Sure enough it was a little after noon. "Man, that kit took a long fu...freakin' time. I guess we did take a few breaks. Uh, sure, lunch. Whaddya' want?"

"Can we have pizza?" Penny requested. "I always have pizza for lunch on Thursdays."

"Sure kiddo...I think we have what we need to make one." Raven agreed.

"No, pizza from Rosso's." Penny shook her head. "Father would take me to my appointment with Glynda, then we would go to Rosso's. I get a personal pizza, plain with light cheese."

Raven hesitated for a moment. "Alright...you know how to get there?"

"Yes." Penny replied.

"You're just gonna' wait in the car, yeah?" Raven asked. Penny nodded in confirmation. "Okay, put some shoes on." Penny slipped on her shoes, tying each with an elaborate knot, as Raven slid on her already tied sneakers. "All set?"

"I am ready to go." Penny announced, picking up her child booster seat.

"Okay, let's go." Raven could not help but chuckle. Seeing Penny happy and enthusiastic made her feel surprisingly good. Beyond Penny's initial phobias, Raven had been worried that she would not connect with the girl, but that fear proved unfounded. She led Penny to her car, unlocking it and slipping into the front seat. Penny placed her booster seat in the back, climbed atop it, and belted herself in. Raven started the car and the radio immediately blared high-pitched, harsh metallic sound, combined with electronically modulated screaming. Penny screamed in response, covering her ears and squeezing her eyes shut. "Oh shit! Sorry!" Raven smacked the power button to shut off the radio and the car fell silent.

Slowly, Penny moved her hands away from her ears and opened her eyes. "Is it...i-is it over?"
“Yeah, I'm really sorry.” Raven apologized. "I forget how loud I play my music sometimes."

"That was music?!” Penny gasped.

"Yeah...uh...black metal.” Raven replied.

"It was very scary.” Penny observed. "Why do you listen to it?"

"Well...sometimes, when your emotions are really powerful, you can only work through them is by aggressive, violent exclamation.” Raven attempted to explain.

"You yell and scream very loudly to industrial sounds and electronic distortions?” Penny asked.

"It's actually kinda' therapeutic.” Raven shrugged. "Not for everyone though."

"Maybe...maybe if you turned the volume down a little, it would not be so bad.” Penny suggested. "That decibel level is potentially damaging to your ears.”

"You're not wrong kiddo.” Raven chuckled. "There's a reason my hearing's garbage.”

"Can...can we go for pizza now?” Penny requested.

Raven smiled, looking at Penny in the rear view mirror. "Sure, I think you've earned it."

Qrow and Melanie walked along the forest path, a gentle summer breeze rustling the leaves overhead. They were in a park on Patch, once popular but now mostly deserted after a population shift away from the area. The two might be the only to visit the place all day. Qrow carried a sizeable basket, the main reason behind their presence. "I still can't believe you wanted to go on a picnic.” Qrow shook his head.

"Yang said Patch is a picnic paradise." Melanie explained.

"It just doesn't seem like something that would interest you.” Qrow observed.

"I'm a closet romantic.” Melanie deadpanned. "Besides, I love relaxing outside.”

"Your utter lack of a tan tells me otherwise.” Qrow jabbed. The path opened up into a clearing with a large pond at its center. It was like a scene out of a postcard. "Well, here we are. Pick a spot and we can get started.”

"Hmm...not just yet.” Melanie mumbled, walking to the edge of the pond. She crouched down and ran her hand through the water. "I think I'll go for a swim first.”

"Seriously?” Qrow pressed.

"It's a nice day, the water's warm, it would be a waste not to.” Melanie noted. She took off her shirt and tossed it to Qrow, then kicked off her shoes and began to shimmy out of her jeans.

"What are you doing?” Qrow asked.

"What?” Melanie shrugged. "Don't wanna' get my clothes wet.” After the jeans she removed her bra, then panties, passing them to Qrow as he did his best to avert his gaze. With a smirk, she strode into the water, dipping down until it covered her shoulders. "Care to join me?”

"That's alright, not much of a swimmer.” Qrow rolled his eyes. He instead found a level spot in the
grass, and set about arranging the picnic. After placing the basket and Melanie's clothes on the
ground, he laid out a blanket, smoothing it before taking a seat. Melanie swam towards him, bursting
from the water, back arched, bare breasts on display. Qrow faux yawned. He dug into the basket and
grabbed himself a sandwich. Her first attempt at seduction having failed, Melanie began floating
around on her back, positioning herself for maximum allure. Qrow seemed to take notice, but then…
"Hey, is that a drone?"

"What?!" Melanie gasped. She flailed, frantically covering herself and hiding beneath the water.
Qrow laughed hysterically. "You're terrible!"

"So are you." Qrow grinned. "Now get over here and eat. I brought honeycomb…" Melanie did
love honeycomb. Pouting, she emerged from the water, shaking off as much as possible before
dressing. She sat beside Qrow and joined him in eating. "Gotta' admit, you've got a hell of a
physique. You work out?"

"I'm a model." Melanie noted.

"I didn't ask if you ate." Qrow joked.

"You're full of it today." Melanie grumbled.

"And yet here you are." Qrow teased.

Melanie mumbled under her breath. "You're lucky you can cook."

"Thanks for the tip Sum, worked like a charm." Raven praised as she, Yang and Summer worked on
a building block kit. "You're raising a genius Yang."

"You're welcome!" Summer cheered.

"Winter's the one focused on molding her into a genius." Yang noted. "Me brain no work good."

"That makes two of us." Raven chuckled.

"So everything's going well with Penny then?" Yang asked.

"Mostly." Raven nodded. "Now when I'm around she plays with her cube thing without looking like
she's going to crush it in terror. And she doesn't try to hide from me, unless we're playing hide and
seek."

"I love hide and seek!" Summer announced. "Can I go play with Penny sometime?"

"Uh...I don't know." Raven hesitated. "She'd probably be afraid of you. Somehow."

"Why?" Summer asked.

"Penny's afraid of anyone new." Raven replied. "It's like...Summer, what are you afraid of?"

"Um...spiders I guess." Summer replied.

"Well when she sees new people...it's as if you saw everyone new as a spider." Raven tried to
explain. "I don't know how she sees new people, or why she's afraid, but she is. It takes a lot of work
to get her to be comfortable around you."

"What if we built stuff together?" Summer suggested.
"I mean, that's kinda' my thing, but I guess we could give it a shot." Raven shrugged. "I'll talk to Glynda about it, don't want to try it until she thinks Penny's ready."

"Okay." Summer agreed. "I can't wait!"

"So...mom...you said things were mostly alright with Penny." Yang observed. "Why not totally?"

"Well...there are some aspects of taking care of her that I'm just not comfortable with yet." Raven sighed. "Like giving her baths. It's weird to be around a naked kid, especially since she's not my kid."

"Yeah, I guess you never got to give me baths to get used to it." Yang allowed. "I still don't see how it's a big deal though."

"I just can't help but see nudity as sexual...which is really weird in the context." Raven explained.

"Nudity doesn't have to be sexual." Yang scoffed. "Is everything you do with your clothes off sexual?"

"It is when someone else is in the room." Raven countered.

"Uh, I'm sure you'll get used to it eventually." Yang shrugged. "I guess I have an advantage there. Growing up with Ruby, we'd take baths together all the time, splash and play and wash each other's hair. It's kind of the same with Summer, except the age difference is way bigger, and the questions are a little weirder."

"Such as?" Raven inquired.

"Such as why my boobs are as big as her head." Yang chuckled.

Summer laughed too. "They're like big fluffy pillows!"

"Last time she poked my nipple and said 'boop.'" Yang deadpanned.

"She should probably spend less time around Aunty Nora." Raven suggested.

"Winter said the same thing." Yang noted.

"Aw, but Aunty Nora's really fun!" Summer complained.

Yang grinned. "Wait until after she has her kid. If she goes back to anything like the way she used to be, she'll really be something."

It was time for another pregnancy shoot, part of a busy day at Solstice Modeling. With Yang and Melanie in for shoots of their own, it was all hands on deck. Nora waited on the break room couch while Pyrrha did her shoot. She was wearing the same bikini she had for all the previous weekly pregnancy photos. It had started out rather loose, but now, several months in, it was almost uncomfortably tight. That was the case with much of her wardrobe. Add to that aching feet and ankles, and pregnancy was downright miserable. But now, as Summer giggled while rubbing Nora's belly, it all seemed worth it.

"You're gonna' have a little cousin soon!" Nora cheered.

"I can't wait!" Summer exclaimed. Yang, leaning against a nearby counter and reading a magazine, smiled at the girl's enthusiasm.
"Good, because I'm gonna' need you to help take care of...hmm..." Nora trailed off. "Can you keep a secret?"

"I sure can!" Summer replied.

"You can't tell anyone." Nora insisted. "Well...except Yang, Pyrrha and Sun, they already know...but no one else!"

"I won't tell anyone." Summer nodded.

"Okay." Nora leaned in to whisper in Summer's ear. "I'm having a little girl!"

"Awesome!" Summer smiled.

"She's really growin'." Nora continued. "Sometimes I can feel her kick!"

"Does it hurt?" Summer asked.

"No, but it surprises me sometimes." Nora answered. "It's like she's tryin' to say hi but can't speak yet."

The door swung open to reveal Melanie. She was obviously dressed for her shoot, hair and makeup already done. "Yang, can I talk to you for a minute?" She looked toward Summer and Nora. "In private?"

Yang placed her magazine on the counter. "Sure." She nodded. "I'll be right back Summer." The little girl seemed not to even notice, focused more on her conversation with Nora. Yang followed Melanie to one of the dressing rooms, where the latter took a seat, the former standing with her back against the door. "What's up?"

"So...your uncle...you think he's relationship material?" Melanie asked.

"Isn't it a little late for that question?" Yang scoffed. "You already moved in with the guy."

"Yeah, but at this point I'm not much more than a renter." Melanie explained. "It's not like we've done anything yet, haven't even had a proper kiss. We're both interested...I just want to know if I should take the next step."

"When he was around, Qrow was a great uncle to me and Ruby, kind of like a second father even." Yang noted. "When Summer died it hit him really hard, almost as hard as dad, but he did his best. Once things were sort of settled he joined the military, but that didn't really help him. He was home on leave when Tai killed himself. He asked to be discharged, for family hardship, but since me and Ruby weren't his kids, they refused, and then he turned to drinking. Apparently things went really bad from there, and I didn't have much contact with him until after he started therapy with Glynda. She helped him a lot, and now Qrow seems as stable and well-adjusted as ever."

"I wasn't asking for his life story." Melanie complained. "Just a yes or no would have been fine."

"Yeah, well, it's not that simple." Yang declared. "I can't make the decision for you, just give you a better idea of who he is. I want what's best for him, and what's best for you. If you think being together is going to make you both happy, I don't see any reason not to."

"How is he with relationships?" Melanie asked.

"I'm not sure he's ever been in a committed relationship." Yang admitted. "He used to make a lot
of...off-color jokes, and he definitely got around, but lately he hasn't been like that. I honestly can't
tell you what he'd be like in a relationship."

"Guess I'm flying blind then." Melanie sighed. "He did pass my test though."

"Test?" Yang asked.

"Went skinny dipping right in front of him, to see if he'd try anything." Melanie smirked. "He didn't.
If anything the joke was on me."

"That's fucking weird Mel." Yang chuckled.

Melanie pouted. "You're one to talk."

The apartment door opened, and as Reese walked into her new home for the first time, it felt
anticlimactic. "It's...big." The girl commented, looking about the living room, taking in the colors,
examining the sculptures and artwork, all with a blank, passive expression on her face. "Weird."

Blake and Velvet shared a look at that. Reese did not seem as impressed with her surroundings as
Summer. There was no wonder, no excitement, not even interest. She looked visibly uncomfortable.
"It's a bit odd, but it grows on you." Kali chirped. "Would you like to see your room sweetie?"
Whether the enthusiasm was fabricated or not, it got a shrug from Reese, and Kali pushed Velvet and
Blake forward, whispering to go on.

"It's just down here." Blake explained, looking to meet Reese's bored gaze as she passed down the
hall. "The bathroom is here on the right." She gestured to a door as she passed. "We have our own
attached to the bedroom, so this one is yours."

"Okay, thanks." Reese murmured, following onward until they reached another door, on the left this
time.

"This one is your room." Blake opened the door.

Reese peeked in. The room was more dull than the rest, a mix of white, black and grey, neutral save
for a single cyan pillow on the bed, a spur of the moment purchase by Kali. Reese walked in, taking
in her surroundings, still passive in her demeanor. She approached the bed and pulled herself up onto
it, bouncing slightly to test its softness before looking up to the trio, her lips pulling together, in what
may have been the closest thing to a smile they had ever seen from her. "Thank you." She
whispered.

"It's a bit bare, I know, but we can go shopping tomorrow, get some things to make it feel more like
your own." Velvet suggested. "That sound good?" Reese simply nodded. Blake and Velvet brought
her bags, small as they were, into the room, sitting them at the foot of the bed.

"Would you like some time to unpack?" Blake asked.

"Yeah." Reese confirmed.

"Take your time." Velvet said. "When you're ready, come out and we can talk, alright?" Reese
nodded again, meeting their gazes individually. Kali offered another smile, but Reese looked down
again. Taking this as their cue to leave, they closed the door and retreated down the hall.

"That felt so awkward." Blake flopped onto the couch, Velvet taking the seat beside her. Kali
remained standing.
"She thanked us, twice." Velvet noted. "That's progress, isn't it?" She looked to Kali.

Kali could only shrug. "We just need to give her time. She has a home now. When that sinks in, she'll become more social. The grey probably didn't help dear."

"I didn't want to make any decor assumptions," Blake explained. "The room is a blank slate. Reese can change or add anything she wants to it."

"It was probably a shock, going from all this…" Velvet gestured to the decorations that lined the living room. "...to that. She looked so uncomfortable."

"And that will pass." Kali soothed. "Girls, be patient. Nothing worth doing was ever easy."

"I can think of several smartass comebacks." Blake smirked.

Kali rolled her eyes. "You will keep them to yourself."
The first full day of Reese's new life started slow. She slept in late, much later than even Velvet on a slow day. When the young girl finally emerged, blinking blearily into the open, breakfast was long past. Kali had no objections to making a lovely brunch however, nothing heavy, just some waffles. After all, lunch was coming up, and today was a shopping day.

As far as progress went, Kali considered it a successful day. Reese was her usual silent self at first, speaking only when spoken to, and with a little encouragement eventually filling a cart with new possessions and decorations for her room. New sheets, curtains, pillow cases, a lovely lamp - that was more Kali's doing than Reese's - and after a tad more prodding, a stuffed bear. The toy finally inspired the ghost of a smile on her cute little face. Some new clothes joined the pile. Though Reese had a decent amount in her luggage, in the opinions of Kali, Blake and Velvet, more was always better.

Lunch brought forth a new snippet of information. Reese liked donuts. Or at least, donuts were the first thing she had the confidence to request. Either they were one of her favorite foods, or she was simply testing the waters, growing more comfortable with the idea that she could now do that. It was a small but important step, a baby one, an appreciated one. They rounded out the trip with some grocery shopping. With Kali cooking for them, the pantry and fridge seemed notably sparse, and with a new mouth to feed, they decided to go all in, filling another cart to the brim with what felt like half the damn store by the time Blake hefted it to the checkouts. Included were several bags of corn chips, Reese had asked nicely and they were discounted. Another baby step.

After arriving home, Reese assisted with carrying everything into the apartment, as best she could at least. She was only able to manage one or two bags at a time, but she insisted, silently, holding out her arms to be filled. Blake resisted giggling. Reese looked so determined, and it was another step in the right direction. Eventually the car was unpacked, and the groceries were stored in their respective locations. That just left Reese's new things.

"Why don't you do something fun while we get your room set up?" Blake suggested as Reese spun around on one of the breakfast bar stools, still comically blank faced. "It'll be cramped in there with all of us, and we've been dragging you around all day." Reese stopped spinning to shrug.

"That sounds lovely." Kali answered for her. "Is there anything you want to do Reese?"

Reese stared at the floor for a moment, before shrugging again. "Can I go for a walk?" She finally mumbled, looking up at Blake.

"As long as grandma keeps an eye on you, sure." Blake nodded. "Stay safe, have fun." She looked to Kali, who beamed, before she and Velvet walked off.

"Is there anywhere you'd like to walk to?" Kali asked cheerfully.

Reese almost smiled.
wishing to appear alone. It had stung back then, at first, but once she caught on, it was simply another aspect of Blake to handle. At least she was not yelling and shunning her like other teenagers. No, it took a few more years before that began.

Reese stopped by a road crossing, waiting for Kali to catch up before reaching for her hand. Kali smiled as she took it, looking both ways for traffic before stepping forward, allowing the girl to lead her across. To her delight, Reese did not let go when they reached the other side, instead continuing to pull her forward, through the open gates of a nearby park. Kali had been so fixated upon Reese she did not even notice their destination.

"This is a lovely place." Kali cheered. "The gardens are so well done, and Summer loves the play equipment."

"Who's Summer?" Reese asked suddenly.

"Summer is the darling daughter of Yang Xiao-Long and Winter Schnee." Kali replied. "You can call them Aunt if you like."

"Are they your daughters too?" Reese asked.

"No." Kali giggled. "Though if I stay long enough, I may have to adopt them. They are lovely people, and Blake considers them family."

"But they're not really." Reese suggested.

"What makes you say that?" Kali asked.

"Isn't family when you're...you've got their blood?" Reese fumbled.

"Reese, family isn't such a simple thing." Kali responded. "You can be related to someone, and not consider them family, because family is more than who popped out of who."

Reese giggled and Kali almost stumbled in shock. Reese smiled, really smiled for the first time since they had met, and giggled at that too. "Momma used to say family was love, not life." The smile was gone as quickly as it had come, and they stopped. "Is that what she meant?" Reese looked up at Kali with watery eyes.

Kali felt her heart ache. "I think so dear. Family is a bond, it must be cherished and nurtured. It is a sacred and beautiful thing that can very easily be broken." Now it was Kali's turn to tear up, kneeling down and taking Reese's other hand. "Family is what you make of it Reese. If you know someone for so long, that you love them, love them like you love your parents, and they love you back just as much, are they any less your family?"

Reese looked into her eyes, lower lip trembling, before she swallowed, blinking away her tears and sniffing. "I can have more real family?" Reese asked, voice wobbly.

"Of course you can dear, it's why we want you here." Kali pulled forth a handkerchief, dabbing Reese's wet cheeks with care. "My daughters want to start a family of their own, but they wanted to give someone else a family too. Because they're wonderful, beautiful people, and I'm proud of them. And I'm proud of you for giving them a chance." Kali beamed as Reese gradually smiled, for the second time that day.

"You are?" Reese looked hopeful, joyful even, like a whole new girl. It was adorable, and a massive step forward.
"Of course I am sweetie." Kali held open her arms, and after only a moment's hesitation, Reese stepped forward, willing snuggling into the loving embrace. "I'm proud of you because you're being so strong, you're trying so hard, and you've put your faith in us. You've already come so far, a little longer, and you'll be smiling and running around like a girl your age should."

Kali sat on a nearby bench, Reese having found the play equipment, thankfully unoccupied. It was peaceful, and nostalgic, watching Reese play, for the first time seemingly without a care in the world. Blake was never one for play equipment, but she did enjoy climbing, so they would go for hikes into the forest, searching for trees and steep hills to scale. Once Blake claimed to be a wildcat, chasing her prey. Kali called her a wild-kitten instead. And she never stopped.

A cheer shook Kali from her reverie, and she looked to the source, a skate park just across the way. A dozen or so teenagers were watching one of their own skate from side to side on the...half pipe? Is that what the kids called it? Kali had only the occasional mention in movies and TV to go by. They seemed pretty...swood? That was the new word was it not? "Swood...kids are strange." Kali laughed aloud.

Kali had always wondered if Blake would turn out like them, outgoing but rebellious. She adopted the style, and some of the attitude, and spent plenty of money on skateboarding stuff. But she never did go out often. Not since her friendship...relationship with Ilia had ended. She had still worn skinny jeans, but gravitated toward more leather than she had before. In truth it inspired Kali. Perhaps it was worth sacrificing some comfort, if only to feel a little younger. She loved her kimonos, but all the women she met just looked so damn good in those tight outfits and thigh high boots...wait, where was Reese?

"Reese, sweetie, are you okay?" Kali called, standing. "Reese!" She called again, worried.

"I'm up here." Reese replied.

Relieved, Kali approached the play equipment, circling the structure until Reese came into view, sitting at the top of a slide. "What are you doing up there?" The equipment had two slides, a spindly one and a long one, and Reese had been going down both of them last she saw.

"Watching them." Reese pointed at the skate park, just in time to see a skater pull a handstand, much to the amusement of his friends.

Kali looked from the spectacle back to Reese to see her eyes shining. "Do you like skating?"

"I dunno', I've never tried it." Reese shrugged. They continued to watch the teens as more joined the fray, skating about, jumping, occasionally falling but never faltering. One by one they would get back up, brush themselves off and try again. There was something admirable about that.

"Would you like to?" Kali inquired.

"Huh?" Reese responded.

"Skate, like them." Kali gestured toward the teens.

Reese bit her lip, looking away from the skaters. "I wouldn't be good at it." She mumbled, notably downcast.

"Maybe not at first, but with practice, you can be good at anything!" Kali tried to encourage, though Reese seemed unconvincled.
"Can we go home now?" Reese finally requested.

Kali heaved a small sigh. At least Reese called it home, a small step, so very small. "Of course sweetie." She waited for Reese as she slid down one final time, offering her hand for the girl to take, which she did, allowing them to walk side by side back onto the path. "Wanna' help me put dinner on?"

"Sure, what is it?" Reese asked.

"Hmm...how about pizza?" Kali suggested. "Do you like pizza."

Reese managed another smile. "I love pizza."

Exhausted, Blake and Velvet fell upon Reese's bed. Let it never be said that decoration was not a difficult job. They lay there for a time, resting, relaxing. Velvet's hand found Blake's, and she grasped it, lifting it to her lips for a kiss, prompting a chuckle from her wife, who moved to snuggle into her side. "You know, my room wasn't this fancy." Velvet observed.

"Oh really?" Blake inquired.

"Yeah, my bedframe was this ugly blue thing." Velvet elaborated. "I had a set of drawers that were white, and a big wooden toy chest. Complete hodge podge, mom always bitched about me not keeping it clean."

"Oh yes, speaking of clean rooms-" Blake started.

"I'll get to it later." Velvette laughed, pecking Blake on the cheek. "My curtains - hell if I know where mom found them - were these blue grey things with a bunch of race cars on them. I don't even like cars. I have no idea why they were in my room. And the room had a bunch of those glow in the dark stars stuck on them from the previous owners."

"I'll pick some up for our room." Blake joked.

"Ew, God no." Velvet scoffed. "Those things are horrible. They faded so much before we moved."

"My room was fancy, but not like this." Blake noted. "Menagerie started as a Mistrali colony, so the architecture stuck around, and mom and dad lived in a small mansion, still do."

"So what, paper doors?" Velvet asked.

"Some of them, over time and renovations a bunch got replaced with glass or wood, mainly for rooms that demanded more privacy or soundproofing." Blake replied.

"And your room?" Velvet inquired.

"Big, and neat." Blake answered. "I liked it darker though. Most of the house was bright from skylights, but I had thicker curtains. I always liked candlelight better, so dad had sconces installed for me...I need to thank him for that again."

"Candles and curtains, what could go wrong?" Velvet joked.

"Hey, I was careful." Blake protested. "I only spilled wax two or three times!"

"Oh that explains a lot." Velvet grinned.
Blake laughed, bumping Velvet's hip. "Down girl." She ordered, turning to wrap Velvet in a proper hug. Velvet tucked her head beneath Blake's chin. "When Reese is settled, we should go visit."

"You hate flying." Velvet noted.

"We'll take a cruise...or I'll face my fear again," Blake shrugged. "I have to someday. I wanna' go home Velv, it's been too long."

"Okay." Velvet agreed, planting a kiss on Blake's collar. "When Reese is ready, when you're ready."

Blake nodded. "Yeah...when we're ready."

The pizzas were delicious, a labor of love on Kali's part, and of hunger on Reese's. Two small pizzas were reserved for Blake and Velvet - meatlovers and vegetarian respectively - along with a large cheese and garlic for Kali, and cheese and bacon for Reese. Velvet expressed concern that Reese had bitten off more than she could chew, but by the time they had finished theirs, Reese had already rinsed her plate in the sink. Evidently the girl had an appetite. Afterwards she took a shower, and joined them to watch television until, with drooping eyes, she bid them goodnight.

"Bet you wish Blake was that easy to get to sleep." Velvet joked.

"Oh, I just resigned to being smug when my little kitten looked dead on her feet in the morning." Kali teased.

"Worth it." Blake shot back.

"Yes, I'm sure staying up til three in the morning reading *The Forbidden Fortress* was entirely worth it." Kali ended with a somehow even smugger grin.

Blake went pale and Velvet burst into hastily stifled laughter. "Oh my God, you went through Blake's smut?" Velvet balked.

"No, I picked up a stray book from the floor while gathering dirty laundry." Kali explained.

"And her undies too, oh God, ahaa!" Velvet cackled. She was cut off by a pillow to the face, which she clutched, falling over into her partner's lap.

Blake stared blankly at a red-faced Kali. "I want a divorce." She deadpanned.

"Too late now, she's already the dad of the family." Kali chuckled.

"A fact I am thankful for." Kali noted. "We can send them off to golf while we sunbathe on the beach."

"I love golf!" Velvet cheered, still giggling.

Blake pushed the pillow back over Velvet's face. "I sunbathe nude mom."

"Well, there's a first time for everything." Kali grinned. Blake rolled her eyes again, smirking. Kali decided now was the best time to broach an all important subject. "Hey Kitten?"

"Yes mother?" Blake answered in a faux accent.
"Do you still know how to skate?" Kali asked.

That got an odd look from Blake. "I guess...why?"

Kali grinned.

Qrow rinsed his mouth of toothpaste, spitting in the sink and watching the froth swirl down the drain. He felt less tired than usual today, but still, the weariness from an average day's work made itself known. He was not a young man anymore, and he felt it, in the aches and pains that wracked his joints. Few things were more pleasurable than the sweet embrace of his soft mattress at the end of the day.

"Qrow." Melanie called. And that was one of them. "Hey babe."

Qrow felt arms wrap around him from behind, and a small smile come to his lips as he lay his hands over them. "Hey, how was work?" He asked softly. The warm skin of Melanie's cheek met his bare back, hot breath tickling his skin in a sigh.

"I...think I'm in love with you." Melanie's voice trembled.

Qrow felt a pang run through his chest as he tensed. "That's...a big word Mel."

"I know." Melanie murmured.

"Are you sure about...Mel, I like you, I like being around you, but I'm nearly twice your age, why me?" Qrow asked.

"You're f-" Melanie started.

"Don't give me the 'you're fun' bullshit." Qrow grasped her arms, pulling them loose enough for him to turn around to face her. Melanie looked...scared. He wrapped her in a hug to soothe her, and she quickly snuggled into his arms. "Mel, I'm not an idiot. I know your type, and everyone I talk to says the same. You're not the kind to just attach yourself to someone, 'specially not like me. I'm fun, yeah, but that's not why you stick around. There's more to it than that, isn't there?" He waited, patiently, for Melanie to form her response, well aware that this would be one of the most important conversations they would have. It would either be the first of many, or the last.

"You make me feel." Melanie finally whispered. "Before, life was just...grief. Glynda helped me understand it. Yang, Blake and even Winter? They helped distract me. But you? You make it go away. You make me feel happy, you make me feel angry, you make me feel safe, here in your arms." She clutched Qrow tighter, nuzzling into his warmth. "You make we want to try again."

"Mel...I'm probably not the best choice for second chances." Qrow sighed, running a hand through Melanie's hair.

Melanie huffed. "Why? Because you're messed up? Because you drink?"

"Because I've got twenty years of baggage." Qrow answered. "I nearly died in the military. I had PTSD, I still have PTSD. It doesn't go away, it sticks in the back of my mind like a rabid dog on a short chain, and every day I worry about it coming loose. What if I lose it Mel? What if I open my eyes and you're the enemy? What if I'm cornered and you've got a gun? I won't know what's going on, I'll just react, like I was trained to. What happens then huh?" Qrow felt his voice thicken with emotion. He cupped Melanie's cheek, turning her gaze upward to meet his own. "When you show up with bruises and excuses that I 'didn't mean it' how are people gonna' react? They'll treat you like
 Melanie gazed up at him with more warmth than he had ever seen in her eyes. Slowly, she reached up, cupping his face and pulling him down, her lips meeting his in a slow, passionate kiss, breaking it only to remain in close contact. "Pain and love go hand in hand. Nothing good ever came without a catch, and a few bruises are nothing compared to the agony of loneliness. I'm tired of it Qrow, and I know you are too. Even if the worst comes to pass I'll deal with it. But for the record I think you're stronger than that. I have faith in you, in us."

"Faith is a rare thing." Qrow noted.

"Hmm...wanna' share?" Melanie offered.

"Sure...right after I shave." Qrow nodded.

"Don't." Melanie rubbed his stubbly cheeks. "I like it rough."

"Oh?" Qrow quirked his brow, smirking.

Melanie rolled her eyes, then smirked herself. "Yeah." Reaching back, Melanie took Qrow's hands, guiding them lower, and lower, until they rested on her firm behind.

"Is this another test?" Qrow drawled.

"Maybe...wanna' push your luck?" Melanie teased.

Qrow grinned. "I'd love nothing more."
"Goodnight." Yang said softly before turning off the light and shutting the door to Summer's room. She headed for the kitchen table, where Winter was already seated, a stack of folders in front of her. "Well, Sum's down for the count. What're you up to?"

"Please, take a seat." Winter gestured to the chair across the table.

"Oh boy." Yang groaned. She obediently sat in the chair. "Whatever it is, I didn't do it."

"I think it's time we start discussing schools." Winter continued.

"I told you, I'm too dumb for college." Yang scoffed.

"Not for you, for Summer." Winter rolled her eyes. "She'll be attending kindergarten, starting in September, but we need to choose the right school."

"Can't we just home-school her?" Yang asked.

"No, that should only be a last resort." Winter shook her head. "Going to school is a vital part of her social development." Yang opened her mouth to protest, but realized she had no counter to Winter's point. Winter slid the stack of folders toward Yang. "I've put together information on several schools."

"Fine." Yang sighed. "Let's see…" She picked up a folder and started looking through the information. It included several photographs of the school, along with demographics and any details the parents of prospective students could possibly want. "This one's in Atlas!"

"Yes, I attended it." Winter noted.

"She's not going to school that far away." Yang insisted. "She's going somewhere close. I'm going to drive her to school and back every day."

"I suppose it shouldn't be more than 20 minutes away then…" Winter thought aloud. She went through the folders, pulling most and putting them on the vacant chair beside her. "That leaves three acceptable options." She slid the relevant folders in front of Yang.

"Okay, this one looks nice." Yang observed. The school was small, located next to a sizable playground, with a large fenced-in field behind it. Vale Early Childhood Academy...sounds classy. Wait...these uniforms...is this a military school?!

"It is." Winter confirmed. " Discipline is a vital element of her education, and what better way to instill that discipline-"

"She's five." Yang interrupted. "There's no way I'm letting her go to a military school."

"Fair enough." Winter sighed. She closed the folder and placed it atop the other rejects.

"South Vale Elementary School." Yang read. "Everything looks...okay."

"It's a very good school." Winter declared. "They prefer students to enter in pre-kindergarten and attend through fourth grade, but given Summer's circumstances I'm sure they'll make an exception."
"Your cash won't hurt either." Yang smirked. "What else...Vale School of the Holy Maidens? A religious school? I'm shocked."

"I may not be a believer, but the school has a fantastic reputation." Winter explained.

"I'm not thrilled about the uniform policy." Yang cautioned. "Children should be allowed to express themselves through their clothes, at least a little."

"I agree that there is some value in that." Winter allowed. "But I don't think that should be enough to disqualify the school entirely."

"I mean, we're already down to two choices, so ruling it out isn't really an option." Yang shrugged. "Uh...no public schools?"

"What, don't you want Summer to get a decent education?" Winter scoffed.

"I went to public school." Yang huffed. Winter grinned. "Okay, point taken, but Ruby went to public school too."

"Did you like it?" Winter asked.

"Hated it." Yang answered.

"Oh?" Winter responded.

"I mean, it was alright until high school." Yang sighed. "Then came the bullying."

"You were bullied?" Winter asked.

"Believe it." Yang insisted. "My first year was okay, but I was a...sudden bloomer. Came back from summer vacation for my second year, and bam! I had tits. I wasn't the only one, but I did stand out. Before that I was kind of plain, mostly ignored. After that I was the blonde bombshell. All the boys wanted a piece, and a few weren't afraid to say so. Some even got a little handsy, not that it was ever that serious. The girls were jealous, and they spread nasty rumors about me. The few friends I'd had distanced themselves. Being a lesbian in a small country town wasn't exactly easy either."

"That's awful." Winter shook her head.

"Yeah, well, it didn't go on too long." Yang continued. "Ruby started attending the next year. She was small, and admittedly kind of weird, a really easy target. When people started bullying her, well, I let my fists do the talking. People mostly left me alone after that, and they definitely didn't mess with Ruby." She leaned back. "Should have done it a lot sooner. So, how was your private education? I bet you loved it."

"No, my experience wasn't ideal either." Winter sighed. "I've never been the most social, but I always seemed to have lots of friends. Over time I realized they weren't really my friends, they were only interested in me because of my wealth and the prestige of my name. After getting burned a few times, I stopped trying to have friends and focused on my studies instead. Weiss was the only friend I needed anyway. Things got better in college. People there didn't give a shit about who I was, I joined the artsy crowd, cut loose for the first time in my life. I had a wonderful relationship with a girl named Lisa, then...then my father found out and told me to break up with her and stop hanging out with 'miscreants.' He threatened to cut me off if I didn't and...I did as I was told." She buried her face in her hands. "Fuck, I treated them so badly, broke Lisa's heart. I should've stood up to my father but...I didn't."
"Win, it's alright." Yang reached across the table, placing her hand on Winter's shoulder. "It's not your fault. Your father put you in an impossible situation."

"You may be right...it doesn't really matter." Winter refocused. "We're getting off track. This shouldn't be about us and our hangups, this needs to be about Summer."

"Are you sure we can't home-school her?" Yang pressed.

Winter hesitated. "If South Vale and Holy Maidens don't work out then...maybe."

"Of all the things in the world she could be interested in, it had to be bloody skating." Velvet grumbled for the third time that day. Kali's suggestion had come as a surprise to both her and Blake, for different reasons. Velvet had figured Reese would be a much more passive girl interest wise, and Blake never expected her one-time hobby to rear its head so far out of left field.

"Kids love skating." Blake noted. "It's always a cool thing. The crowd tends to follow hipster fashion trends, and every city has parks and postmodern architecture to frolic around."

"I knew skaters when I was a kid." Velvet huffed. "They weren't cool or hip. They were pricks and bullies and druggos and every other week someone would have a broken or bandaged arm or leg."

"So your local group were assholes?" Blake chuckled. "My group? Apart from Ilia they weren't bad at all. They taught me how to skate, someone always had a medkit on hand, and every Friday after school we'd all bring food and stuff and share it."

"And what will this group be?" Velvet asked.

"I'll find out when I go there won't I?" Blake responded.

"You're just gonna' embarrass her." Velvet warned.

"Sure." Blake laughed. "Maybe I will, and you're gonna' watch."

Velvet let out a sigh, thumping her head against the headrest. Blake just smirked, turning the corner to her destination, some clothing store that catered to hipsters. Blake had visited on occasion for their designer t-shirts and accessories. She could order everything online if she wanted to, but browsing whatever was in stock at the time was more enjoyable. In addition to fashion, the store also had a sizeable selection of skating gear, among other things, but skating was clearly the focus. And it was there they headed upon entering.

"Hey Tannon." Blake called to the tattooed man with slicked blonde hair.

Tannon turned from his task of tidying up a display to wave. "Yo Blake, sup?" He greeted, then caught sight of Velvet. "Oh hey, you're Velvet right?" He walked forward, holding out a hand.

Velvet met it with her own, shaking it firmly. "Yeah, hey."

"Didn't think I'd get to meet you." Tannon noted. "It's been a while since Blake's been here." He withdrew, leaning against one of the display tables.

"Been busy, mom showed up, dad showed up, adopted a kid." Blake explained.

"God damn, seriously?" Tannon was taken aback. "You kinda' got me beat here, I met a chick at a beach party, but she was gone when I woke up. Didn't even leave her number."
"Ouch." Blake chuckled.

"I'll meet the right one someday." Tannon shrugged. "But anyway, you adopted a kid?"

"Yeah, kinda' why we're here." Blake confirmed. "Apparently she wants to try skating, but she doesn't think she'll be good. So I'm gonna' teach her."

"You finally gonna' get a board again?" Tannon asked.

"Yeah, two." Blake nodded. "Need one for a girl about yay high." Blake held her hand at hip level.

Tannon nodded. "We've got a bunch of kids size over here." He gestured for Blake to follow as he moved toward the back of the store. "And designer boards, blank boards if you wanna' buy some custom tape."

"What about protective gear?" Velvet inquired.

"Helmets, knee and elbow pads, wrist guards." Tannon pointed to a rack. "Got gloves too, but they're mostly for runners."

"Runners?" Velvet asked.

"Parkour, Sun's thing." Blake clarified.

"Oh." Velvet said.

"Personally I'd go against the designer boards." Tannon advised. "It's always better to build your own. That way you know what you're getting. With them you're buying a brand, not a product."

"Careful, the boss will bust you for not upselling." Blake joked.

"The boss'd kick my ass if I sold you crap." Tannon repeated. "You're a valuable business opportunity and all."

"Damn right I am." Blake smirked.

"Bloody hell, four hundred lien?" Velvet balked at a price tag as they reached the back wall.

"Yeah, like I said, you pay for the brand." Tannon repeated. "I've got a tape book here. Got a size in mind for yours?" Tannon picked up a binder from a table, handing it over.

"Mini, thanks Tannon." Blake replied.

"I'll grab the merch." Tannon grinned, heading out the back door.

Blake flicked through the pages, browsing all manner of colors, logos and patterns, until she felt Velvet close by her side. "What if she falls off and gets hurt?" Velvet worried.

"I'll help her get back up, and on the board." Blake stated matter-of-factly.

"Blake, what if she breaks something?" Velvet pressed.

"I'll pick her up, take her to the hospital, baby her while she heals, and then help her back on the board." Blake answered.

"Blake." Velvet roused.
Blake sighed, looking at her partner. "Velv, remember Shirley?"

"Duh." Velvet replied.

"She said she loved tag, but kept tripping." Blake noted.

"And?" Velvet asked.

"She kept getting back up." Blake explained. "No matter how many skinned knees she got, she refused to stop. One day she won't trip over so much. You think that's because tripping over had no consequences?"

"And what, if Reese breaks her arm you think she'll be better for it?" Velvet pressed.

"Yes, I do." Blake answered. "Kids should run around, skin their knees, get in fights, break their bones. They're young, they'll hurt, they'll heal, and they'll learn." Blake tapped a design on the page, and Velvet looked at it - black, with white, purple and cyan stripes. It fit, Velvet thought. "We all go through it, and babying her won't help. Look at Yang. She and Ruby ran around the forest as kids, she's broken her arm in two places. Sun trains kids to jump off high objects for fun. Nora is a walking bulldozer. You think they grew up with their parents telling them to stop running so fast? Mom took me to climb trees and rock walls. Mom did that." Blake chuckled at Velvet's shocked expression. "I remember falling down one day. I was winded, struggling for breath, mom just picked me up and rubbed my back until I felt better. Then she asked me if I wanted to try again. With a smile on her face."

Blake felt herself tear up, and Velvet's expression softened. She wrapped her arms around her partner and nuzzled her shoulder. "I thought it was weird Kali didn't have a problem with this." Velvet noted.

"Mom is awesome." Blake declared. "If we can be half as awesome as her, we'll be great parents." Blake wiped her eyes.

"Alright, I'll try not to freak out too much about a four year old flying around concrete and metal on a little piece of wood." Velvet promised.

Blake smiled. "Thank you dear."

Before they headed home, Blake stopped at the nearby park. Her own board had the same striped design as Reese's, but was nearly twice its size. Donning a matte black helmet, Blake dropped her board, placed her right foot upon its surface, and for the first time in over a decade, pushed off with her left. It was like riding a bike. If she and the bike had grown up over the years. It was as if all those years had never happened, she was just a teenager, skating to the town park after school, swerving left and right. Her balance was perfect, as it always was. The trucks could stand to be a little looser though. When Velvet caught up, she was using a hex key to adjust them.

"What's wrong with it?" Velvet asked.

"Nothing." Blake replied. "Look, you see this rubber here? The tighter you screw this nut, the less it flexes, and the harder it is to turn while leaning. I like it looser. A beginner like Reese would probably want it tighter."

"Oh, I didn't know they had those." Velvet noted.

"You thought they were just wheels on the board didn't you?" Blake snickered.
"Well it's not like I asked to look at one up close and personal." Velvet groused.

"Well." Blake dropped the board again. "Now's your chance." Blake beckoned to the board.

Velvet stared at the board, then at Blake. "No." She refused.

"Come on now." Blake laughed.

"Nope." Velvet repeated, crossing her arms.

"It's just a board." Blake insisted. "Come on, give it a shot."

"Newp." Velvet looked away.

"Chicken." Blake teased.

"You and the kid can crack your heads open, I don't care." Velvet huffed. "I will remain standing to say I told you so."

"Oh, so now you don't care." Blake pressed.

"Yep, I'm the cold and uncaring one now." Velvet scoffed. "Go on, go show off for the cool and hip teens. Go on." Velvet waved her hand towards the skate park. It was fairly well populated, music softly playing from someone's speaker.

"Alright, I will." Blake smiled, kicking the board into her hands.

"Fine." Velvet said.

"Fine." Blake turned and walked away, hips swaying with just a little more exaggeration than usual.

Velvet stared, until Blake looked over her shoulder and laughed. "Stupid sexy hipster punk." Velvet grumbled, before following.

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Yang found the whole situation uncomfortable. Winter had insisted she wear a sort of formal, dull dress, and now she sat in an office as Winter chatted with the headmaster of South Vale Elementary School. The pair were checking out the school, seriously considering enrolling Summer. It had started with a tour, which went well enough. The school was quite impressive, large, clean, with all the amenities. Several classrooms had computers for each child, and all had a computer-linked whiteboard at the front. They gym and athletic fields were in great shape, fully kitted out with all the equipment an elementary school could conceivably need. Even the cafeteria impressed, with their tour guide describing the hot, fresh-cooked meals served every day.

Now Winter was asking questions that were over Yang's head. She did not care about the curriculum, or the demographics, or the teacher/student ratios. When Summer got to high school, when her education really started to have an impact on her life afterward, then Yang would care. Right now Yang just wanted a place where Summer could be safe, where she could be happy, or at least a place she could tolerate. She still vividly remembered how difficult it had been for Ruby in elementary school. She had been bullied mercilessly, in spite of Yang's efforts to protect her. Her parents had wanted to send her to another school, but money and circumstances made that impossible. But Yang had the money, there were options for Summer.

"I'm honored that you would consider this school for your daughter, Ms. Schnee." The headmaster smiled, their extended Q&A apparently over.
"And I have to thank you for allowing Summer to enroll on such short notice, and in such unorthodox circumstances." Winter responded. "I think this would be a wonderful place for her, but it's not just my decision. Yang?"

"Hmm?" Yang shook herself from her daydreaming.

"Do you have any questions Ms. Xiao-Long?" The headmaster asked.

"Yeah actually, uh, at the orphanage, Summer had some difficulty with bullying." Yang replied. "What do you do to protect the students here?"

"We do not tolerate bullying here." The headmaster declared. "But at the same time, we expect our students to have the strength to stand up for themselves."

Yang stared blankly at the headmaster, who smiled back. Yang glanced at Winter, whose expression had shifted, then back to the headmaster. "Nope." Yang said.

"What?" The headmaster asked, tilting his head in confusion.

"Winter, let's go, we're done here." Yang stood. "I've heard enough."

"I'm inclined to agree." Winter admitted. "I don't think this is the school for Summer."

"But our-" The headmaster tried to protest.

"Save it." Yang cut him off. She borderline dragged Winter from the building, mumbling under her breath all the while. "Stand up for themselves, how's a five year old girl supposed to stand up for herself…"

"Hopefully Holy Maidens will have a stronger policy against bullying." Winter sighed.

"It'd fucking better." Yang growled. "Or we're homeschooling Summer."
Raven put the book down on the bedside table. Classic literature was not exactly her idea of a bedtime story, but it was Penny's. She had just finished reading Penny a chapter, and now it was time to sleep. Raven stood and pulled the covers up, tucking Penny in. "Goodnight." Raven smiled.

"Goodnight Raven." Penny responded.

"You know, you can call me mom if you want." Raven suggested.

"Alright Raven." Penny nodded.

*Swing and a miss.* Raven thought. She turned off the lamp, walked to the door, and lingered for a just a moment before stepping out and closing it. It was not just Penny's bedtime, but her own. Long gone were the days of wild parties and staying up past dawn. Part of Raven missed those days, but mostly she was grateful. Now she had someone to come home to, someone she loved, who would be there for her no matter what. It was comforting, even if it did make her feel a little old, and more than a little lame.

Glynda put her own book down as Raven entered the bedroom. "How's Penny?" She asked.

"She's fine, same as always." Raven replied. "Kept correcting my pronunciation." Glynda chuckled at that. "Hey, uh, has she started calling you mom yet?"

"She sometimes calls me 'mother.'" Glynda answered.

"I guess she's not there yet with me." Raven shrugged.

"She's made remarkable progress in a short time." Glynda noted. "I'm sure it won't be long."

"She was able to handle Nora." Raven noted. "Half of the time I can't handle Nora."

"To be fair, Nora is baby-un-crazy, so Penny has an unfair advantage." Glynda joked. "Still, I'm happy it only took three...or was it four meetings...to get her to stop being afraid."

"Better than it was for me." Raven grumbled as she began dressing for bed.

"Well, Nora looks and acts like a harmless, if manic, overgrown child." Glynda suggested. "You look like something that would crawl out of a TV in a horror film."

"Oh haha." Raven pouted.

"I've been doing my best to introduce her to people she should find non-threatening." Glynda explained. "She loves pizza from Rosso's, so I introduced her to Rosso. She likes Pyrrha and Nora, so I introduced her to Sun. They're baby steps, but steps nonetheless."

"What's next?" Raven asked.

"I'm not really sure." Glynda admitted. "Maybe Yang, since she's like a less-threatening version of you."

"What about Summer?" Raven suggested.
"Go on." Glynda encouraged.

"Well, she doesn't really have friends her age...well...neither of them do." Raven observed. "Maybe it would be good for them to get to know each other." Raven paused. "How about this? We put them together in a room with a giant building block set and some pizza, and let nature take its course."

"Hmm...I never would have thought of that." Glynda nodded. "That's a solid plan."

"Wait, what?" Raven was taken off guard.

"That might be the best suggestion you've ever made," Glynda continued. "I mean, that's not saying much, but it does seem like a good idea."

"I did a smart!" Raven faux cheered, rolling her eyes.

"You get a gold star." Glynda deadpanned.

"Speaking of stars, Penny was watching some astronomy programs today." Raven noted. "She seemed pretty interested. Maybe she'd like sci-fi movies. Could be a way for us to connect. We should watch one together."

"If you're talking about the one with the alien that eats people's faces, the answer is no." Glynda stated.

"I was thinking something a little more upbeat, but now that you mention it, I haven't watched Xeno in a while." Raven smirked.

"You will not watch that horrid film in Penny's presence, or mine." Glynda commanded.

"Fine." Raven shrugged. "I guess we'll stick to Stellar Battles for now."

When Blake and Velvet had shown their gift to Reese, she had been shocked, awed and concerned. "But I don't know how to skate?" She had fretted.

"I'll have to teach you then, won't I?" Blake stated, smirking.

It was a beautiful, sunny, late summer's day. The clouds were picturesque, the breeze cool, the sun warm, a perfect day for a family outing. And so they walked, Blake and Velvet flanking Reese, each holding a hand in their own, along with their new skateboards and protective gear. Kali followed with a loaded picnic basket.

"What if I fall?" Reese asked, looking up at Blake as they walked hand-in-hand, Velvet on her left, Blake on her right.

"We'll be here to help you up." Blake answered with a confident grin. To her joy, Reese smiled, squeezing her hand. When she met Velvet's gaze, she was smiling too.

"Energetic as always." Kali observed as she approached.
Yang spun around, grin gleaming in the sunlight. "Kali!" The woman in question barely had time to set the basket down before being pulled into an enthusiastic hug. "Oooh, I missed you."

"We only saw each other a few days ago!" Kali laughed, returning the embrace.

"And you're gonna' be gone soon." Yang noted. "Gotta' get in all the hugs I can." Yang squeezed tighter, giving a little shake before pulling back.

"I told Blake not to tell you that." Kali sighed. "I was going to tell you today."

"No secrets among friends...Mama Bell." Yang teased.

"As I've been told, I very nearly was Mama Bell to you." Kali smirked.

Yang looked momentarily shocked, then a sad smile overtook her face. "Blakey talked about that huh?"

"Blake and I talked about many things." Kali took Yang's hand in her own, picking up the basket with the other, and led them to a nearby bench to sit. "I can imagine you would have made quite the couple." Kali met Yang's gaze with a reassuring smile.

Yang struggled to match it. "Blake is a wonderful woman Kali. I spent a long time regretting what I said back then. Sometimes I still do. But everything has turned out perfectly for us. And I can never be less than thankful for that."

"You know you intimidate Velvet, right?" Kali asked.

"She's silly like that." Yang grinned. "Maybe I should tell her I crushed just about as hard on her. She just never showed a hint of interest, and Blakey did."

"My baby girl has good taste it seems." Kali observed.

"Mama Bell, are you flirting with me?" Yang faux gasped.

"What?" Kali really gasped. "No, well not that you're not beautiful I…" Kali caught sight of Yang's teasing grin and scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Can I confess something?" She asked, suddenly speaking in a hushed tone.

Yang dropped her smirk to something more gently. "Course you can."

"I...never gave the fairer gender much thought, prior to this time in my life." Kali admitted. "I was taken off guard by Blake and Velvet, not because I disapproved, but that it just never occurred to me, that it was okay. My family was religious, I grew up in a small town, homosexuality was pushed so far to the wayside I never really paid it much mind, and somehow I avoided direct exposure to it for years as I married Ghira and raised Blake...I think back to those years and all the times I saw two young women together and thought 'what nice friends, I wish I could have that,' and now I've seen Blake and Velvet, and Nora and Pyrrha, and you and Winter, and I think, I could have had that, if I'd just known it was okay, that it was an option. I love Ghira, with all my heart, but a part of me is saddened. I feel...deprived, in my ignorance, if that's understandable...is that a bad thing?" She looked to Yang, biting her lip.

"I don't think so." Yang replied. "It's kinda like...you grew up in a house, and it was a big house, but you never even knew you could leave. Then one day the front door opens, and you wander out, and you're shocked and surprised, a bit scared, and fascinated by the big new world you never knew existed. Then you start wondering why no one told you about it. How do you feel about it Kali? You
can be honest."

"I...you're right, fascinated, but scared." Kali answered. "I love Ghira, Yang, he has made me the happiest woman in the world, but...well it's only natural to be curious."

"Then you should talk to him about it." Yang suggested. "He's your life partner, he loves you completely and utterly, and he didn't skip a beat for Blake and Velvet. Tell him how you feel, vent a little. You never know what might come of it. I mean...just look at the Valkyries." Yang smirked, turning to an amused grin as Kali's eyes went wide, and her face red.

"No way." Kali struggled.

"Yeah way." Yang encouraged.

"Ghira would...Ghira is my husband." Kali fumbled. "He is devoted to me."

"And you think he wouldn't be up to his beautiful wife experimenting with the fairer sex?" Yang pressed.

"Putting it that way makes it sound so juvenile." Kali huffed.

"So?" Yang asked. "When it comes to women you are juvenile, you're inexperienced. The idea has only just come to you, and you're slowly coming to terms with it. It's okay to play, ya' know? You think Winter's always the queen of cool? You should see her in the bedroom, reow!"

"Oh by the Maidens Yang, have some decency!" Kali exclaimed.

"Made you bluuuush!" Yang teased.

"You're terrible." Kali huffed, looking away. "Remind me never to talk with you again."

"Noooo, Mama Bell!" Yang implored, clinging to Kali's arm. "I'm sorry, please don't hate me."

Kali scoffed, leaning her head against Yang's, reaching over to lay a hand on hers. "I could never hate you...Little Lion." Kali added with fondness.

Yang chuckled. "Little Lion? I like it, makes me feel all fuzzy inside."

"It suits you..." Kali murmured, stroking her hand. They sat for a time, watching Summer in the distance, oblivious to the world outside her bubble. "How are you sleeping Yang? Are you having nightmares?"

Yang smiled. "No...no nightmares...only dreams."

Velvet strapped Reese into her helmet, and knee pads, and elbow pads, then tightened the helmet straps just a tad more. "Velv, you're going to strangle her before she can even start learning." Blake joked.

"Your noggin is the most important part of you." Velvet ignored Blake. "This thing saves lives Reese. No matter who says it looks lame, learn to love helmets." She knocked on the plastic surface for emphasis.

Reese chuckled. "I'll try."

"Good girl." Velvet smiled, standing and looking to Blake.
"You ready?" Blake asked, her board held on end. Reese reached up, adjusting her helmet slightly before nodding. "Okay, we start small. Hop on your board, and I'll push you. This'll train your balance."

"Alright." Reese obeyed, dropping her board and stepping onto it, slowly, one foot at a time.

Blake stood poised to catch Reese should the board suddenly move. "You alright?" She asked. Reese nodded, raising her hands for balance. "I'm just going to pull you along, to get you used to how it feels first, okay?"

"Okay." Reese acknowledged, raising her arms farther out. Blake gently grasped her by the armpits, and with a final warning, began guiding her forward, the board slowly whirring over the concrete path.

Velvet began recording on her phone. Normally she would have brought more dedicated equipment, but this was not a video shoot, no behind the scenes documentary, no interview. This was the first recording of a family memory, and in the years to come a somewhat rougher aesthetic would feel more nostalgic. There really was nothing like pulling up an image or video from your library to show off on the spot.

Blake pushed Reese until she could move in a straight line unassisted. Then she taught her to steer, leaning slightly forward and back. She stumbled, once even steering onto the thankfully soft grass, and Velvet found herself grinding her teeth in paranoid worry, but Reese only laughed, loudly and joyfully, pushing herself up as Blake laughed along with her. And just as Blake said, she hopped right back onto the board, the smile never leaving her face.

When she had turning down pat, Blake taught Reese to propel herself forward, combining the three basic skills and practicing over and over, until Velvet found herself laughing along as Reese zoomed past completely unassisted, Blake jogging after her, stopping to pull Velvet into a searing kiss before snatch up her board and taking off after the wayward skater. Velvet was tearing up before she knew it. Reese was smiling, Reese was laughing, and having fun, thanks to Kali and Blake. Velvet helped, kind of...well, maybe she would find something of her own to bond with Reese over. Someone had to record all her 'sick grinds' after all.

Looking over toward the play equipment, Velvet saw Kali and Yang seated on a bench, the little red dot of Summer bouncing in front of them. She smiled, watching Kali shake with laughter, Yang springing up to begin chasing Summer about, her high pitched squeals carrying over the distance. She smiled at the sight, though it still saddened her that Summer had chosen Yang over them, it brought her joy to see Summer so happy. They had met at their lowest points in life, bared their souls, grown close, bonded, found love, found absolution, so many things could have gone wrong, so many paths could have been taken, and yet miraculously they had all survived. Velvet found her love in Blake, Yang found her love in Winter, and now they found family in Summer and Reese, or at least, they were on their way with Reese. Time would tell.

"Hey you two." Velvet stepped onto the path, keeping the camera trained on Reese and Blake as they came to a halt in front of her, grins wide and panting with exertion.

Reese kept her momentum as she ran into Velvet, wrapping her arms around her waist. "I can skate! I can skate! I can really do it!" Reese cheered louder than she ever had before, jumping as she looked up with bright, cyan eyes.

Velvet laughed, patting Reese's helmeted head. "You're doing great, but hey, wanna' take a break? There's some people I want you to meet."
"Who?" Reese asked, tilting her head.

"Your aunt and your cousin." Velvet replied. "Yang and Summer."

Sun had taken Nora and Pyrrha to the doctor for checkups...again. It seemed to him, and to Nora for that matter, that it was all a little much. They always went in, were checked, and sent out with a clean bill of health for themselves and the babies growing within them. But Pyrrha was not to be swayed. She was going to be cautious. In her mind being too careful was far better than being not careful enough. Still, Nora and Sun would have preferred she be exactly as careful as was necessary, without going overboard.

The appointments bored Nora. Sure, it was nice seeing her little girl on the ultrasound scans, but the rest was a real drag. Even in her new, more sane state, she needed some stimulation afterward. Today she asked if the trio could stop in to visit Yang. It was a Saturday, and the others had nothing planned, so they agreed. Yang always enjoyed hanging out with Nora, even boring pregnancy Nora.

"Sorry, Yang took Summer to spend some time with the Belladonnas." Winter explained.

"Aw, I wanted to talk about baby names." Nora sulked. "Now what are we gonna' do for the rest of the day?"

"Well, you don't have to leave." Winter noted. "I know I'm not as...lively as Yang, but…"

"Aw, you're still awesome Win." Nora cooed, slipping past Winter and into the house. "I bet you've got some fancy names in ya'."

"Well...come on in then." Winter offered, stepping aside to allow Pyrrha and Sun to enter unimpeded.

Nora was already on the couch with her feet up on the coffee table. Pyrrha sat beside her, and Sun beside Pyrrha. "Nora, it's rude to put your feet on the table." Pyrrha admonished.

"I know." Nora smirked. She swiveled around, laying her legs across Pyrrha and Sun instead.

"Do you guys want anything?" Winter asked. "Coffee, tea?"

"I am craving cheesecake." Pyrrha answered. "Has Yang made any lately?"

"She has, but I'm afraid it belongs to Summer." Winter replied. "You don't want to incur her wrath." She took a seat opposite the trio.

"Even pregnant, I'm pretty sure I can outrun her." Pyrrha chuckled.

"Doesn't matter." Winter shook her head. "She's patient. She'll just wait for you to let your guard down before she strikes."

"What would she do to me?" Pyrrha asked, feigning fear.

"Tickle you until you can't breathe, or until you promise to replace the cheesecake you denied her." Winter said dramatically.

"Not tickle torture!" Pyrrha gasped. Everyone had a good laugh.

"You know Pyrrha, you really are amazing." Winter changed the subject. "If I didn't know already, I'd have a tough time guessing you're pregnant. Your figure's barely changed at all."
"You call it amazing, I call it worrying." Pyrrha sighed. "I keep feeling like I'm not doing something right, no matter how much the doctor tells me it's normal. Sometimes I wonder if my body's really cut out for pregnancy."

"I know mine isn't." Winter complained. "These damn narrow hips…"

"Would you really consider carrying a baby?" Nora asked.

"I wouldn't exactly volunteer." Winter noted. "If Yang really wanted it, and she couldn't carry for some reason, I'd consider it. Still, it would take quite a lot of convincing." She chuckled to herself. "Forget what it would do to my body, it would play havoc with my work!"

"Being unemployed has its advantages." Nora leaned back, resting her head on the couch's armrest, shifting her rear into Pyrrha's lap.

"You're going to be fully employed when we have these kids." Pyrrha warned. "You're going to be a full-time mom while Sun and I work."

"I know, I know." Nora shrugged. "Which is why I'm going to enjoy my free time to the fullest until then."

"Sun, how is your business doing?" Winter inquired.

"Pretty good." Sun replied. "We've got more students than ever, which means more income than ever. Unfortunately, now that I have Sage and Scarlet working more hours, I have to pay them more, and there goes the extra money. The place is getting a little crowded too. I'm saving up for an expansion."

"Hmm...maybe I can help with that." Winter suggested. "I'm always on the lookout for investment opportunities."

"I know the polite thing would be to decline, but hell, I'd love the help." Sun said. "Life's about to get a hell of a lot more expensive for me, and I'll take what I can get."

"Sun, we don't need your money for the kids." Nora noted. "I've got plenty, and Pyrrha makes doctor money."

"I'm not just gonna' knock you two up and leave you to fend for yourselves." Sun countered. "I'm not gonna' be some kinda' deadbeat dad."

"What kind of money would you need for the expansion?" Winter refocused.

"Oh uh...no clue." Sun admitted. "Sage is the numbers guy. I'd have to-"

"Um...Nora, could you move?" Pyrrha interrupted.

"But I'm comfy." Nora whined.

"Yes, I know, but I really need to use the bathroom." Pyrrha insisted.

"You went before we left the doctor's office." Nora complained.

"And I have to go again." Pyrrha nodded. "Now."

Sun stared blankly at Winter. "Another one of the ravages of pregnancy."
Much to everyone's regret, Kali had commitments in Menagerie, commitments she could no longer ignore. With the start of the school year fast approaching, the day came when she had to depart, on an early flight no less. Yang was already an early riser, jogging for an hour before returning, showering, and making breakfast for Winter and Summer. Today it was straight into the shower, wake up Summer, cook breakfast, take Winter's in to her on a tray, kiss her goodbye and leave for Blake's place, Summer ever so slowly waking up beside her. The Belladonnas were about to leave as they arrived, so they continued on to the airport.

Upon arrival they still had a little while before Kali's flight, and the security checkpoint was almost empty. That gave them plenty of time to say their farewells. Summer and Reese glued themselves to Kali's side, and Yang took the opportunity to discuss the future. "We've been discussing some locations. Mistral is obvious, but it's so overdone. Then, I thought, hey, we've got family in Menagerie now, and we've been there like...twice, didn't even get to go sightseeing, why not look into there."

"Oh, there's some lovely places in Kuo Kuana." Kali encouraged. "Ghira and I were married in this little local shrine a few minutes out of town. It was right on the edge of this cliff overlooking the ocean. I know the priestess, Sienna, I could speak with her for you."

"That sound awesome." Yang agreed. "I'd appreciate it."

"Who's Senna?" Summer asked.

"Sienna is a lovely woman who has always been supportive of me." Kali replied. "Over the years I paid many visits to her shrine to pray for Blake and..." She suddenly paused, eyes wide. "And she has been flirting with me this entire time!" Kali whined, blushing.

"Flirting?" Reese asked, confused.

"Sienna likes grandma Kali, sweetie." Yang chuckled.

"Ugh, I feel so stupid." Kali lamented. "How was I that ignorant? She was always so nice and giving me hugs and telling me how strong and beautiful I am and that my presence gives her faith and ugh, I thought she was just being dutiful!"

"What's going on?" Velvet asked, returning with Blake, bringing a tray of coffee and a bag of donuts respectively.

"Kali just realized she's got an admirer." Yang smirked, accepting a cup from Velvet with a thanks.

"Who, Sienna?" Blake guessed, opening the bag and holding it out to Reese, who took a pink iced one with a smile.

"You knew!" Kali balked.

"Yeah, she told me." Blake admitted, holding the bag for Summer. "She caught me and Ilia making out and did the whole 'when I was your age' thing. Said her tattoos were to pick up chicks."

"Well they are alluring, I'll give you that...I mean...they look...cool." Kali sighed as she blushed
again, accepting a cup of her own from Velvet. "She told me they represented her attunement with the wilds. Her ancestors were warriors. When they came of age, they were challenged to hunt a powerful beast alone, and either kill or tame it. If they killed it, they were welcomed as a warrior. If they tamed it, they joined the priesthood."

"And Sienna tamed a tiger apparently." Blake chuckled. "I guess it has something to do with the Maidens' favor."

The PA suddenly announced the boarding call for Kali's flight, non-stop from Vale to Menagerie. Kali sighed. "Time for me to go." She said morosely.

Reese and Summer both wrapped their arms around Kali's. "We'll miss you." Summer sniffled.

"When will you be back?" Reese asked.

"As soon as I can dears." Kali replied. "I promise. I'll come back to you, and I'll bring Ghira with me so you can meet him Reese." Everyone stood, Reese and Summer clinging to Kali all the while, Velvet taking Kali's carry-on. They moved toward the security checkpoint. "You know girls, I wish I could take you with me, but your parents would miss you very much." Kali joked, but her voice was already straining.

"Do you really have to go?" Summer whined.

"Yes dear, I do." Kali answered. Nearing the checkpoint, she stopped, turning to kneel, setting her coffee down, and pulling both girls into a hug. "But I said I'd be back as soon as possible, and I said I promised, and I have never broken a promise...that I remember. And neither should you, which is why I want you to promise me you'll behave while I'm gone. Your parents are loony enough without you joining in." Kali smiled as the girls giggled. Blake rolled her eyes. "Lemme' say bye to everyone, okay?" She asked in a whisper. The girls reluctantly let her go, to be replaced by Blake and Velvet. "I love you two. I'm so glad to have met you Velvet, and to have seen you again at all Blake. If the plane crashes at least I'll die happy."

"Mom, don't joke about that." Blake admonished. "I love you too, and we'll try and visit you first, okay?"

"Good luck either way mom, thanks for your help." Velvet added.

"Thank you for making my daughter happy." Kali pecked them both on the cheek before letting go and moving to Yang. "You be strong Little Dragon." She whispered, feeling Yang's familiar, strong arms return the embrace. "You call me anytime you want to talk, okay?"

"I will, thank you Kali." Yang chuckled, tightening her grip until she lifted Kali from the ground.

"Oh goodness!" Kali laughed as Yang set her down. She knew it was time to go. "Right...well, time to get this over with." She took her carry-on from Velvet and paused, taking a deep breath before grabbing Blake in another, tight hug. "I love you so much Blake. Thank you for coming back to me." She cried, sniffing.

"I love you too." Blake stammered, hastily returning the embrace. "I'm sorry I didn't come back sooner."

"I know, so am I." Kali responded. With a final hug for the children, and almost forgetting her coffee, Kali gave one last wave, and made her way to the metal detectors.

"You okay hon?" Velvet asked, reaching for Blake's hand as she rubbed her eyes.
"Yeah, just stupid emotions, blegh." Blake complained.

"Yeah, well I've got more on the way, taking the tot to meet her new cousin...other new cousin." Yang added.

"I have another cousin?" Reese asked.

"Yeah, but she's a bit scared of new people, so we're taking it slow." Yang explained. "You'll meet her eventually, if she doesn't run screaming from Summer here."

"I'm not scary," Summer protested.

"Sure you are." Velvet chuckled. "Red hair is a sign of the devil. Didn't you know?"

Summer looked up at Velvet, a bit confused. "Huh...cool."

Penny hid behind Glynda's leg, watching as Raven answered the front door, booming knocks having startled Penny out of focus on her documentary. She was starting to get used to that sound, knocking. Before, it always signaled temporary intrusions. Her father rarely left the house, food and supplies were delivered, Penny could always hide safely in her room, never forced to interact with strangers. But now, every knock brought something new. These visitors were not strangers, not truly. They were beloved friends and family of Glynda and Raven, her adopted mothers, making them her family too.

A part of her was excited by this, even if the rest was terrified. When Glynda had calmly asked her, if she would come and meet Pyrrha's partners, it had taken everything to not scuttle and hide in the nearest corner. But it was Glynda, the closest thing to a mother she had ever experienced, who had dedicated herself to helping Penny grow, in the hopes that one day she might be normal. So she had clung to Glynda's hand, taken a deep, shaky breath, and slowly allowed herself to be taken to meet these new people, her Uncle Sun and Aunt Nora. They were wonderful people.

Now Penny observed new visitors, Yang, Raven's daughter, and Summer, Yang's own adopted daughter. Technically Yang was her sister by adoption, making Summer her niece, but Raven asked that she be called her aunt, as Yang's younger sister had passed away, and it might bring up bad memories. And this way, Summer was her cousin, her first relation close to her age. And the most terrifying thing in the world at this moment.

"Hey mom, hey Glyn." Yang greeted, a stack of pizza boxes in her hands.

"Hello Yang." Glynda responded.

"Hey grandma." Summer chirped, reaching for a hug.

Raven bent down to scoop Summer up. "Hey pest."

"Who wants pizza?" Yang cheered, shaking the boxes gently so they rattled. "A little birdy told me I have a new family member to greet." She knelt down, meeting Penny's timid gaze. "Heya', I'm Yang."

Penny gulped, tightening her grip on Glynda's leg. "H-hi...I'm Penny." She stammered softly.

"It's great to meet ya' Penny." Yang continued. "Mom's been gushing about you for ages. You're just as cute as she said you were." Penny could not help but smile. It was surprising how different Yang was to Raven. They were almost exact opposites, despite their close resemblance. Her features were
smoother, her hair golden, her eyes the gentlest shade of lilac Penny had ever seen, brimming with warmth. "Hey, I've gotta' grab something from my car, you think you can take these for me?"

Yang set the pizza boxes down, and Penny looked at them, then up at Yang, then down again, and nodded. "Yes I can."

"Thanks, I won't be long." Yang slowly stood, grinning wide, pausing only to poke summer in the belly with a "Boop" and running off.

"Hi, I'm Summer." She said.

Penny jerked, looking up at the other newcomer, and felt that familiar tightness grasp her heart and throat, a frightened squeak her only response. Adults were one thing, adults knew who she was, they were smart, considerate, patient...usually. Other children her age? Penny had never had the chance to find out. The very idea had always terrified her.

Suddenly, gentle fingers threaded through Penny's hair, stroking and massaging her scalp. It was a calming technique her father had used, and now Glynda, and sometimes Raven did the same. She did not know why it worked, perhaps it simply stimulated the pleasure center of her brain, maybe deep down she craved simple physical affection. Maybe she thought far too hard for someone her age. Regardless, it was time for her next social challenge. "Hello Summer." She spoke up. "I-it's nice to meet you."

"I like your name." Summer responded.

"Thank you." Penny managed. Her name was rather interesting. "I like your hoodie." She had never thought much about her attire, only that she was neat and orderly, but that hoodie looked very comfortable.

"Thanks, it's my favorite." Summer smiled. "It's really warm. You should ask for one."

"I might do so..." Penny and Summer seemed to find themselves at a standstill.

Raven and Glynda exchanged a look. "Penny, why don't you show Summer your models?" Raven suggested, setting Summer down. "She's always been curious about them."

Penny, to her credit, only froze for a few moments before plastering on a nervous smile. "Okay." She agreed, and Summer beamed, bending over to pick up the pizza boxes herself, an act at which Penny was silently relieved. It meant she would not have to approach her, yet. No, that would come soon, but not now, a comfort, however slight, which she clung to as she slowly led the other girl down the hall and toward her room, leaving Glynda and Raven to grin at each other.

"It's working!" Raven cheered.

"It is?" Yang suddenly piped up from outside, having held back to avoid interrupting.

"So it seems..." Glynda murmured, looking down the hall. "Let's go spy on them."

"Where do you want this?" Yang asked, revealing the large, box shaped bag in her hands. It rattled when she shook it.

"Lounge room." Raven specified, before following Glynda down the hall. Yang hurried to set the package down before she too followed. Reaching the end, she found Raven and Glynda peeking through a partially opened door. They made way for Yang between them, and she peeked through as well.
Penny held a model before Summer. "It was the first Grand Prix car to use disc brakes in its design, and it won the World Championship because of the advantage it held."

"So it won because it could slow down better?" Summer suggested.

"Yes, exactly!" Penny cheered.

"Oh my God, they're nerding out together." Yang almost squealed.

"Let's give them some privacy." Glynda suggested, leading the others to quietly creep away.

"She's even more adorable in person." Yang observed as they entered the lounge, taking one of the armchairs for herself.

"It's criminal, isn't it?" Raven chuckled.

"Oh, you love her." Yang scoffed.

"I know, I can feel my shrivelled heart swelling sizes, I'm in constant agony." Raven whined as she flopped onto the couch.

"I'm so proud of her." Glynda said, voice thicker than normal. "When I met her she was scared of every spec of dust in the air. Panic attacks were common. It took a year before she let me hold her hand." She chuckled, moving to sit beside Raven, who immediately pulled her close. "I guess I never thought about it before it happened but...I've always cared for her more deeply than I professionally should have. Maybe I always saw her as a daughter, like Pyrrha. I just assumed the role and never questioned it. I just did what felt right."

"You've always done what's right by us, and we've always seen you as a mom." Yang noted. "Team mom, to all the little broken children, putting us back together piece by piece." She meshed her fingers together.

"Edgy, sweetie." Raven rolled her eyes.

"Eh, the goth phase was fun." Yang shrugged.

"Regardless, thank you Yang." Glynda continued. "You always made my actions feel appreciated. You all did, but you? Even at your worst you put on a brave smile, and never truly gave up. I know at times you thought yourself disappointing to me, but your willingness to fight on regardless always left me with great pride in you. You were as much a help to the others as Pyrrha, what with your sunny disposition."

"Aw, you're gonna' make my cry Glyn." Yang croaked, wiping away a fake tear with a grin.

"I think we've cried enough for a lifetime." Raven observed.

"Hah, ain't that the fuckin' truth." Yang laughed.

"Language!" Summer admonished. Everyone turned to see Summer and Penny standing in the doorway, each holding several pizza boxes.

"Oh, heeey girls." Yang chuckled guiltily.

"Mother, Mom, our pizza is getting cold." Penny stated, moving forward to hand them out.

Raven looked dazed, blinking only when Penny beamed at her, and turned to give Yang her pizza.
"I...I'll get us drinks." She stood, moving her pizza to the coffee table, and walking out of the room. Penny and Summer seemed oblivious, setting down to open their own meals.

Glynda and Yang exchanged a look. "I'll go help." Yang volunteered.

Raven shakily pulled glasses from the cupboard, along with a bottle of soda from the fridge. When she closed the door, Yang had joined her, a soft smile on her face. "Hey mom."

"Fuck emotions." Raven half-whispered, half-chuckled, turning back to the glasses to fill them.

"You know Summer does that." Yang observed. "I'm mom, Winter's mother. Makes sense ya'know. Win's the proper one, I'm the normal one. I wonder who she'll grow up to be like."

"Between the two of you?" Raven smirked. "Winter's got none of me in her, so fingers crossed."

"Mom." Yang's arms wrapped around Raven's midsection, and she paused to take a heavy breath.

"Daughter." Raven said.

"Two of us now." Yang noted.

"By some freak miracle...I'm so fucking terrified of fucking this up Yang." Raven sighed.

"Just do your best, and take it one day at a time." Yang advised. "It's all I've ever done, and so far it's working out."

"And if it doesn't?" Raven asked.

Yang chuckled. "That's when Winter steps in."

"Cemeteries are where dead people are buried, right?" Summer asked.

"That's right." Winter confirmed.

"So, is mom buried here?" Summer asked as Yang guided the car through the silent Patch cemetary.

"No...uh...she's not...she's not really buried anywhere." Yang struggled. "Her mom and dad are though."

"Oh...okay." Summer did not really understand, but she was not going to ask further questions. Winter was giving her a look that told her not to do so. Earlier, Winter had explained that the trip meant a lot to Yang, and that even if Summer thought something about it was weird, she should not press too hard.

"I know it's strange, but this is the only place I really have for her." Yang explained. "Ruby's physical body might not be here, but I like to think her soul is." She regretted the timing of the trip. Kali had just returned to Menagerie, but she was exactly the person Yang most wanted to talk to about it. She had been able to open up to Kali about Ruby in a way she could not with most people. Kali's faith was comforting, even if Yang did not quite share it, and her hugs were magical. Now the best Yang could do was give her a phone call. It was not the same. "Well, here we are."

Yang pulled the car to a halt and shifted into park. She pulled the lever to open the trunk and got out. She retrieved some cleaning supplies from the trunk, and Winter brought along an intricate flower arrangement as the trio walked to the gravesite. Yang stepped forward, cleaning the stone before
removing some weeds that had grown at its base. It was quick work thanks to her relatively frequent
visits, even if it had been a little longer than usual since the last one. With everything tidied up,
Winter placed the flowers in front of the stone. She stepped back, lining up beside Yang and
Summer.

"What do I do?" Summer asked.

Yang opened her mouth but words failed her. Winter stepped in to help. "There's no set thing you
have to do. Yang likes to talk to Ruby and her parents, and I talk to Weiss when I visit her grave.
Some people pray, others just try to remember the good times they had with the deceased."

"Okay." Summer responded. She had no memories of her mother, knew few prayers, and could not
think of anything to say, so she just stood there, head down and silent.

After a little time - to Summer it seemed uncomfortably long - Yang spoke up. "Uh, could you guys
give me a few minutes?"

"Of course." Winter replied. She picked up the cleaning supplies led Summer back to the car.

Yang crouched down by the stone, running her hand over Ruby's name. "Hey sis. Sorry it took so
long to visit again. I guess you already know, but I found Summer." She paused, taking a deep
breath to suppress the emotion in her voice. "I wish you woulda' told me. I mean, I understand why
you didn't, and I'm not mad about it or anything. I just...I guess I just wish I coulda' been there for
Summer sooner. And I know things were rough when you got back, but if you told me...I don't
know...maybe we could've talked about it, maybe it would've helped a little. I never wanted you to
feel like a burden, you weren't. I'm sorry I couldn't do a better job of providing for us...maybe then
you wouldn't have had to hide it."

Yang wiped away a stray tear and managed a smile. "She's really great, ya' know? It's like having a
tiny you running around the house. Maybe...maybe this is my second chance. I can give her the life I
couldn't give you. I'm gonna' do everything I can to make it a happy one. I just...wish you were here
to see her...to see her smiling and laughing...I know how happy it would've made you. I hope it does
make you happy, wherever you are." Yang looked back. Winter and Summer were leaning against
the car, chatting. "I shouldn't keep them waiting much longer. I promised Summer I'd take her for ice
cream. She loves her sweets just as much as you do. I'll uh...see you soon. Bye sis, love you."

Yang stood and walked back toward the others. Summer looked a bit uncomfortable, but Winter
offered an encouraging smile. "Ready to go?" Winter asked.

"Yeah." Yang nodded. "You ready Summer?"

"Uh-huh." Summer confirmed.

"Wanna' visit Uncle Qrow before we head home?" Yang asked. "After ice cream of course."

"Okay." Summer agreed. Winter rolled her eyes.

"Great." Yang smiled. "We'll bring him a sundae. We should get Mel something too."

"Maybe then she'll actually smile." Summer giggled.

Yang could not suppress a laugh, despite the somber setting. "Don't count on it kiddo. If there's
anyone on the planet who wouldn't smile for ice cream it's Mel."
Yang snapped picture after picture with her phone. "I think we should call Velvet, get some professional pictures done." She suggested.

"I think you've taken more than enough yourself." Winter noted. "And if you don't stop, Summer will be late."

It was Summer's first day of school, and she was dressed in her uniform, a button-up white shirt with a knee-length plaid skirt. A small red backpack was slung over her shoulders, for now devoid of books, only containing school supplies and a lunch lovingly prepared by Yang. She would be attending the Vale School of the Holy Maidens. They had a strong anti-bullying policy that was the main selling point for Yang, and a top-tier reputation that impressed Winter. Summer liked the playground next to the school. Reese would be attending as well, though she was a year behind.

"But she's so cute." Yang whined.

"Stop procrastinating." Winter admonished. "You need to get going." Yang sighed, putting away her phone and heading for the car with Summer in tow. "Are you sure you don't want me to go with you?"

"Yeah, I can do this." Yang replied, her voice a bit shaky. "I'm just dropping her off. No big deal. Right?"

"Alright." Winter offered a reassuring smile. "Have fun Summer."

The drive to the school was free of conversation, only the music from the radio filling the car. Yang pulled up before the school, into the back of a line of vehicles, more parents dropping off their children. "If anyone's mean to you, tell the teacher okay?" Yang recommended.

"Okay." Summer replied.

"And tell me too." Yang added. "And if the teacher is mean, tell me. Just...if there's any problems, tell me."

"I will." Summer confirmed.

The line moved slowly. It was hardly surprising. On the first day, parents were sure to take extra time before letting their little ones go. "You didn't forget anything at home, right?" Yang asked.

"No, it's all in my bag." Summer answered.

"Good, good." Yang mumbled. She was next in line. The car in front pulled away, and Yang slotted into the designated drop off spot. "Alright." Summer unbuckled her seatbelt and climbed off her booster seat. Yang got out and opened the door for her. "Have fun, I love you."

"I love you too!" Summer cheered. Yang crouched down to wrap her in a tight hug, squeezing until she squeaked. "Bye mummy, see you later!" Summer headed for the school, guided by teachers.
Winter sat at her desk, filling out some paperwork, as cheerful music filled the office. She considered giving Yang a call to see how things had gone, but decided against it. Yang would call when she was ready. Until then Winter would go about her day as normal. It would be a bit strange not having Summer around the studio. It was probably for the best today. Melanie had the only shoot, but it was a little risqué, not something Summer needed to see.

The phone rang and Winter picked it up, looking at the caller ID. She was expecting Yang's call, but it was not her. Instead it read School Office. That did not exactly bode well. Winter was really hoping that Summer had not gotten into trouble just three hours into her school career. She tapped the screen to answer the call. Hello."

"Hello, Winter Xiao-Long?" A woman's voice asked. Winter recognized it as the principal. She and Yang had met with her a few days earlier to discuss Summer's situation and finalize her enrollment.

"Schnee for now, but yes." Winter replied. She could not help but smile at being called Winter Xiao-Long. "Is there an issue with Summer?"

"No, not Summer." The principal replied. "It's Yang actually."

"What did she do?" Winter groaned.

"Nothing...it's just that...she's been sitting in her car, across the street, sobbing since she dropped Summer off." The principal explained. "I'm worried."

"Oh...well then." Winter breathed a sigh of relief. "This was not entirely unforeseen. Would you like me to ask her to leave?"

"No, that's not necessary." The principal answered. "I just want to be sure she's alright."

"I'll give her a call and send someone to check on her." Winter stated. "I don't think she'll want to leave that spot. Expect her to be first in line to pick up Summer at the end of the day."

"Alright...um..." The principal struggled.

"And I'll make sure this does not happen again." Winter added.

"Thank you." The principal said.

"Sorry for the trouble." Winter apologized. "Goodbye." She hung up and leaned back in her chair. "Oh Yang..." She sighed to herself. "Well, I suppose she'll need lunch. Should I bring it myself or send Melanie..."

Boredom aside, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Sun had promised to treat Nora and Pyrrha...
to one of his sensual massages when they got home. His attempts had started off clumsy and at times comical, but over the months he had gotten rather good at it. Plus Pyrrha was always happier after a visit to the doctor. The novelty of the ultrasounds had never worn off for her, and being given a clean bill of health was a weight off her shoulders. That probably explained why she scheduled so many, and why she insisted on being seen first.

The doctor ran the wand across Nora's belly, then stopped. He moved his head closer to the screen and moved the wand back. "Huh." He said. He put the wand down. "Just a moment Ms. Valkyrie." Without waiting for a response he left the room, returning moments later with a second doctor. He moved the wand back to where it had been and pointed to the screen.

"Let me have a look." The second doctor requested. She took the wand and adjusted the positioning, trying to get a better view of whatever it was they were looking at. "Oh...I see it."

"Go ahead and get the room prepped." The first doctor instructed. The second nodded and hurried off.

"What's going on?" Nora asked, trying to hide her growing alarm.

"I'd like to perform an immediate c-section." The doctor replied.

"Why?" Nora pressed. "Is something wrong?"

"I have a concern about the positioning of the baby." The doctor explained. "It's probably nothing, but the safest course of action would be to-" A nurse walked in and handed him a clipboard. "...would be to perform a c-section now."

"O-okay." Nora stammered.

"Just sign here." The doctor thrust the clipboard before Nora. There was a lot of information and fine print, and even had she not been too panicked to read it, most would have gone over her head. She took the pen from the doctor, but it soon slipped through her shaking fingers. She managed to pick it up and scribbled her signature. "Alright, we'll have you prepped immediately."

"I need to tell Pyrrha, and Sun." Nora insisted.

"They're in the waiting room, right?" The doctor asked. "We'll pass them on the way to the operating room."

"Uh...I…" Nora struggled.

The second doctor returned. "The team is getting ready."

"Alright, let's…" The doctor started.

Nora did not really hear what the doctor was saying as panic overtook her. "I-is my baby g-going to be alright?" She whimpered.

"She should be." The doctor replied.

Should.

The first indication that something was up was the increased traffic. Doctors and nurses were heading back and forth between the examination rooms and the OR just down the hall with increasing frequency. The double doors that led to the operating rooms hardly had time to close.
before they were opened once more. Sun seemed not to notice, perhaps his mind was elsewhere, but Pyrrha noticed. Something was happening, and it was probably not good.

The sound of a rolling gurney drew Pyrrha's attention. "Sun!" She gasped. "It's Nora!"

"Huh?" Was all Sun managed as Pyrrha grabbed him by the hand and dragged him into the hall. She was prepared to put herself in the path of the gurney to stop it, but there was no need. The nurses pushing it simply wheeled Nora to her.

"The baby...something's wrong...they want to...now..." Nora sobbed, tears streaming down her face.

"What's wrong?" Pyrrha asked. "What's going on?"

"I saw something concerning on the ultrasound." The doctor replied. "The safest course of action is an immediate c-section. Don't worry. It's very low risk."

"What about the baby?" Sun demanded.

"The baby should be fine." The doctor replied. "This is mostly precautionary."

"Pyrrha...you have to call Yang." Nora instructed. "My baby needs her godmother!"

"Okay, I'll call." Pyrrha nodded, grabbing Nora's hand. "Everything's going to be fine. You'll be fine, the baby will be fine. Just relax."

"I'll try." Nora sniffled.

Pyrrha stepped back and Sun bent down to hug Nora. "It'll be okay." He promised.

Pyrrha and Sun moved out of the way to let the gurney pass, and Nora was wheeled through the double doors to the OR. Pyrrha could hold back no longer. She pulled Sun into a desperate embrace, tears streaming down her cheeks. "This is a nightmare. No...it's worse...it's real...what if-"

"No what ifs." Sun cut her off. "Worrying won't get us anywhere. We just have to believe that it'll be alright. Come on. Nora's indestructible."

"But her baby-" Pyrrha started.

"Is indestructible too." Sun insisted. "Come on, we've got calls to make."

Yang could be an insufferable backseat driver, but for once Winter was happy to take the punishment. She knew that letting Yang drive at a time like this would lead to a wild ride that would probably get them killed. Something was wrong with Nora, or her baby, or both. A clearly shaken Pyrrha had not been entirely clear when she had called, but the upshot was clear enough - get to the hospital now. Yang had been ready to rush out the door, but Winter convinced her to slow down a bit.

Blake, Velvet and Melanie were at Solstice with them, so they should be informed. Winter called the school and Yang talked to Melanie, arranging for her to pick up Summer and Reese at the end of the day. Yang called her mother, Blake called Glynda, and Melanie contacted Qrow. With everything squared away, they packed into Winter's car and headed for the hospital at an expedited, but still safe pace. They arrived alongside Glynda, who had immediately canceled her appointments for the day. Raven had wanted to go as well, but she needed to stay home with Penny.

Sun met the group in the lobby, and once they checked in at reception, he led them to the waiting
room where Pyrrha sat crying, quickly going through a box of tissues. The doctor had explained the situation, that there was almost no threat to Nora's health, and only a minimal risk to the baby, but that had not soothed her. If anything happened to the baby, Nora would be devastated, overcome with grief, it might destroy her. The doctor said everything was probably fine, but if there was not an issue, he would not have ordered the procedure.

There was a long wait without news, filled with many hugs and encouraging words, but also freely flowing tears. When a nurse arrived to notify them that the procedure was complete, and that they could see Nora, it set off a stampede that ended with a very crowded recovery room. Nora was clearly exhausted, physically and emotionally, with tear tracks evident on her face. Pyrrha rushed to her at first sight and embraced her, and Sun moved to her other side and took her hand.

"She...I didn't see her." Nora whimpered. "They took her away...I didn't hear her cry. They didn't tell me anything."

The group shared a round of worried looks, Pyrrha tightened her hug, and Sun squeezed Nora's hand. "Where the hell is the doctor?" He growled.

"Let's all try to remain calm." Glynda advised. She was beginning to sound like a broken record. "We still don't have any information."

"That's the problem." Pyrrha complained. "We haven't been told anything from the start." Glynda could sympathize. She had spent plenty of time dealing with hospitals, much of it left out of the loop.

"I just wanna' see my baby." Nora cried.

"That's it, I'm gonna'-" Sun started.

The door to the recovery room opened. "Oh." The nurse said, seeing the large crowd. "Um...Ms. Valkyrie?"

"Is my baby okay?" Nora asked desperately.

"She's right here." The nurse carried the baby over. Pyrrha backed up, allowing the nurse to place the baby in Nora's arms.

"Sh-she's okay?" Nora stammered, holding her child for the first time.

"Yes, sorry for worrying you." The doctor replied, having followed the nurse into the room. "We wanted to perform a thorough examination as soon as possible, just in case. But she's perfectly healthy."

"Thank the Maidens." Pyrrha breathed a sigh of relief.

Nora smiled at her baby, who looked back at her. "She's beautiful...but so small...are you sure she's alright?"

"She's a little underweight, but within the normal range." The doctor explained. "Her vitals are strong. We'd still like to keep both of you here for a few extra days for observation." Nora nodded absently. Her daughter now had her full attention.

"Are you ready to name her?" The nurse asked.

"Oh uh...yeah." Nora answered. "Solara. Solara Alexandra."
"Sweet name." Yang commented.

"Like something out of an anime, right?" Nora smiled. She looked to Sun. "Wanna' hold your daughter?"

"Um...alright." Sun hesitated. It still did not feel real to him. He leaned in to take the child from Nora's arms. "I'm a dad...I'm a dad." Sun laughed and cried simultaneously.

"I think we should give them some room." Velvet whispered to the others.

"Probably a good idea." Blake agreed.

"I need to give Raven a call, and she can bring the kids." Yang suggested.

The group started to file out. "Yang, wait." Nora called. Yang stopped in the doorway. "Solara needs to meet her godmother."

Yang hesitated for a moment before walking back into the room. Sun approached, handing a now sleeping Solara to Yang. She gazed at the baby, tears welling in her eyes. "She's so beautiful. I want one."

"Sun's for rent if you're interested." Nora joked.

"That's okay." Yang shook her head. "I think I'll have my hands full enough with Summer." She looked up. "Pyrrha, I think it's your turn."

"Okay." Pyrrha approached, carefully taking Solara into her arms. "I'll have my own soon. Hopefully with less drama."

"I'd second that." Yang chuckled.

"Thirded." Nora added.

"Fourthed." Sun smirked.

"Well, I'll let you crazy kids spend some time with the newest member of the family." Yang noted. "The rest of us'll hang out in the lounge. Let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks for being here Yang." Nora smiled.


Nora and Solara remained in the hospital for almost a week, but it was mostly precautionary. They were discharged with clean bills of health once the doctors were satisfied that there were no issues lurking beneath the surface. Sun and Pyrrha spent much of that time visiting the hospital, so all were relieved when they could finally go home. Having a new baby took some getting used to, and even once home they got little rest. Like most babies, Solara did not keep to a schedule, and her crying and fussing would cut any periods of sleep to a few hours at most.

After a few exhausting days, Sun offered to give Pyrrha and Nora some time off. Winter helped, buying them a spa day, and they leapt at the chance. Nora loved Solara dearly, but she needed some relaxation. The spa in question was pricey and well-appointed, if not picturesque. As much as Pyrrha and Nora would have loved a trip to one of the resorts away from the city, they did not want to stray far from home, and so settled for a place in downtown Vale. The reviews were fantastic, and it had all the amenities, so what if the view was lackluster?
The pair started the day with manicures and pedicures, which also included foot massages. Sun was good, but he could not match the pros. Then it was on to full body, deep tissue massages. Pyrrha had difficulty getting comfortable lying down, and so settled for a truncated, seated massage. Still, it did wonders for her shoulders and back. When she was done she checked on Nora, who was still in the midst of her own massage. Somehow she had managed to fall asleep, even as the masseuse kneaded her muscles. Given her recent lack of rest, Pyrrha could not blame her.

Next up for Pyrrha was the main event, a dip in a heated pool of mineral-rich water meant to simulate a hot spring. Nora would join her when she was ready, but for now she was left alone with the attendant, who sat in the corner of the room and allowed her to relax in peace. It was nice, a moment of quiet the likes of which had become increasingly rare for her. Pyrrha let out a deep breath and reclined against the edge of the pool. Then…

"Gah!" Pyrrha gasped as a sharp pain engulfed her abdomen. She doubled over and held her stomach. She had experienced pain like this before. False labor pains, in recent weeks the frequency had only increased. But something was different. It did not just flare and dissipate. The pain persisted. Maybe this one was not false. She pulled herself up and out of the water, sitting on the edge of the pool. "I think…"

"Ma'am, are you alright?" The attendant asked.

"I…" Pyrrha trailed off. As the pain subsided she felt a warm trickle of liquid replace it. "I think my water just broke."

"Oh my!" The attendant exclaimed. "I'll get someone...I'll call an ambulance!"

"Get Nora!" Pyrrha instructed as the attendant rushed from the room. Pyrrha was not alone for long, as several staff members rushed in. They helped her into a nearby deckchair, offering words of encouragement. She grunted as another contraction wracked her body. "Where's Nora?"

Nora was enjoying some of the best sleep she had experienced in months. After stripping down and lying on the massage table, she had fallen asleep almost immediately, snoring loudly even as the masseuse worked away at her muscles. A sound roused Nora from her slumber. It was garbled, and she needed a moment to figure out where she was. She looked around and found herself alone. The nearby door was not quite closed, and there was quite a commotion coming from the hallway outside.

"Nora!" Pyrrha cried desperately from somewhere beyond the door.

"Pyrrha!" Nora yelled back. She leapt to her feet and raced to the door but hesitated. She was completely nude.

"Nora!" Pyrrha called again. "The baby's coming!"

That did it for Nora. Clothes or no clothes, she was not going to leave Pyrrha hanging at a time like this. She pushed through the door and into the hall to find Pyrrha being wheeled away on a stretcher by a pair of paramedics. They were already almost to the exit. "Pyrrha!" Nora shouted. She raced to Pyrrha's side, grabbing her hand. "I'm here."

"Nora...where were you...where are your-" Pyrrha started, only to be cut off by the pain of another contraction.

The paramedics had stopped when Nora reached them, no doubt shocked by her appearance. "Well come on, let's get her to the hospital!" Nora implored. The paramedics looked at each other, and one
shrugged. They continued wheeling Pyrrha on, out the door and into the ambulance just outside. Nora followed without hesitation.

This time there was less of a rush to the hospital. Pyrrha was in normal labor, and it would likely take several hours before her child was born. That gave the others time to make arrangements. It was the weekend, so the kids were not at school. Qrow was called in to watch them. He would take them to join the others at the hospital once Pyrrha had her baby. There was no sense making them sit in a waiting room with nothing to do. He had enough experience taking care of kids to handle even Solara.

Sun and Glynda headed to the hospital immediately, but the others took their time. Yang, Winter and Raven were the next to arrive, followed by Blake and Velvet, and finally Melanie. Even then it was still a few hours before the baby decided to make an appearance. Sun got to do the dad thing this time, being present in the delivery room to witness the birth and to cut the umbilical cord once the time came. He found the visuals alarming, but managed to avoid passing out as he had feared he might.

Soon the others were beckoned into what became another very crowded recovery room. This time, the new mother was all smiles, holding a baby boy in her arms. Pyrrha was flanked by Nora and Sun, who matched her joy. "Everybody, meet Helios Sigmund Nikos." Pyrrha introduced her child. Unlike Solara, Helios looked robust and healthy.

"I can't believe you popped that big guy out of you." Yang joked.

"Me neither, and he was a stubborn one." Pyrrha chuckled. She looked to Glynda. "Well, godmother, want to hold him?"

"Of course." Glynda approached, taking Helios in her arms.

"I guess that makes me his godmother-in-law." Raven observed, looking over Glynda's shoulder.

"So, Sun, gonna' teach your boy to play ball?" Blake asked.

"Just as soon as I learn how to." Sun laughed. "Hopefully he'll stick to parkour."

"Already he wants our kids jumping off buildings." Nora rolled her eyes.

"I'm glad this one came with less drama." Velvet noted. "I don't think I could've taken another scare."

"I know I couldn't have." Sun admitted. "I guess being scared shitless comes with being a dad."

"Language." Winter admonished. "There's a baby in the room."

"Eh, his brain's still mush." Sun shrugged. "I'm gonna' get the swears out while I still can. Fuck! Cunt!" Sun smirked. "You should have heard Pyrrha when she was pushin' this little guy out. I've never heard such loud and angry swearing."

Pyrrha blushed, looking ashamed. "It really hurt."

Yang noticed something odd. She had not seen Nora earlier, as she had not left Pyrrha's side during her labor. "Um...Nora, why are you wearing a hospital gown?"

"Oh, I left my clothes at the spa." Nora shrugged. "We kind of left in a hurry."
"I'm...I'm not even surprised." Glynda sighed, passing Helios to Sun.

"I have some spare clothes in my car." Yang noted. "I'll grab 'em for you."

Pyrrha yawned. "I need a nap. It's been a rough day."

"That sounds like our cue to leave." Winter advised. "It's a bit late already, perhaps we should wait for tomorrow to bring the kids to meet their new cousin."

"Alright." Velvet agreed. "Let's get a round of hugs before we go."

"Sweet, I love hugs." Nora cheered.

"Hugs are great." Yang added.

"You can never have enough hugs." Pyrrha declared. "Never."

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Hours later, all was quiet in the recovery room. Sun had passed out on his chair, snores muffled by the coarse fabric of Pyrrha's hospital bed. He had surrendered Helios to Nora beforehand, who now alternated between staring lovingly at the sleeping child, and at his mother. "You're a lucky little fella', you got the gentle genes. Your sister's gonna' be a bubbly ball of energy ya'know, and you're gonna' have to chase her all over to make sure she doesn't break anything...just like Ren did for me."

Nora could not help but let her voice warble. Sometimes she forgot how this all started, with her dream, to start a family with Ren...and that scared her. Ren was her life, was supposed to be her entire life, but then she lost him, and by all rights she should have followed. Instead she got lucky, she was saved, and she found love anew, family once more, and now she had two loving partners and two beautiful children. It was perfect, even if Ren was not here to see it, though if what he believed were true, he absolutely could.

"I love you Ren, I'll never forget when you did for me, I hope I made you proud." Nora whispered, leaning down to kiss Helios on the forehead. The baby let out a groan, his little mouth bobbing like a fish. Nora giggled at the sight.

"I think he looks like Sun." Pyrrha suddenly whispered.

Nora just smiled. "Cute, but clueless?"

"That too...but he's got his nose." Pyrrha explained.

"Hah, just...I think he's got your jaw." Pyrrha added.

"Please, this is all you babe." Nora countered.

"Hey, take responsibility." Pyrrha insisted. "You're as much her mother as I am."

"Oops." Nora laughed softly. They sat there silently for a time, watching the baby shift in his sleep, soft and delicate, impossibly beautiful.

"Do you think you'll want more?" Pyrrha finally asked.

"Didn't expect you to ask so soon." Nora noted, surprised.
"I know, neither did I." Pyrrha nodded. "Just...when I look at them, I love them, and I think, yeah, I could do more. It's not that I actively want to, I just know that I could, and I'd be happy. What do you think?"

"I think...we're lucky Pyrrha." Nora sighed. "We did it. We wanted to have a kid, we ended up with two, we survived pregnancy, survived the births, had some scares...we are so lucky nothing went wrong, that we can all sit here and just be happy. I don't wanna' tempt fate. I think this is enough. I think this is more than enough. I think this is perfect. I don't want anything to change."

"I understand...but if down the line, when the kids are older and you want to try again..." Pyrrha suggested.

"We'll talk to Sun about it." Nora responded.

"Yeah, he's got his work cut out for him." Pyrrha noted.

"He'll be okay." Nora suggested. "I'll handle the kids, he can handle the gym, and you can go back to doing what you love."

"Are you sure?" Pyrrha asked. "Nora, I don't want to doubt you, but handling two children by yourself is a big thing."

"I know, and I know I'll make some mistakes, slip up here and there...but I'll ask for help when that happens, from you and Sun and Yang and Glynda, Raven too." Nora rambled. "We're not alone in this. We don't have to worry so much. We can just be happy."

"I am happy." Pyrrha declared. "So happy with you, with this, all of it. It's just...it all feels like a dream."

"That's because it is a dream, my dream, the dream you helped come true." Nora smiled. "I love you Pyrrha, now and forever."

Pyrrha felt tears welling in her eyes. "Now and forever, I love you too."

Cinder stood at the bar, staring into her drink, the murky surface reflecting her blank gaze. Relaxation would not come to her, no matter how hard she tried. The music was too loud, the people too obnoxious, and the booze not nearly strong enough. Perhaps if she drowned herself in it she could find some peace. It had never been this difficult, but then again, things were different now. Everything felt numbed. She was almost through downing her drink when movement drew her gaze leftward. Holly, one of the hangers-on that passed for her friends, stumbled beside her, obviously a few drinks ahead.

"Hey Cin..." Holly greeted, wobbling a bit. She put a hand on the bar to steady herself and smiled at Cinder.

"Holly." Cinder said flatly.

"Don't be a downer...come on, we've got the VIP room reserved...let's have some fun." Holly swayed. "And it'll be so much more fun without that lovesick puppy slut following you around." Cinder froze, staring at Holly. Her mind went blank. She finished off her drink and placed it on the bar. "Well?"

Cinder turned and unleashed a right hook that landed flush on the side of Holly's jaw. In an instant she was on her back. Cinder leapt atop her, pounding Holly's face repeatedly with her fists. Holly
whined in pain and drunken confusion, struggling to defend herself against the onslaught. Cinder felt an arm tug at her shoulder but she ignored it, landing another punch. Finally she was pulled up and off.

"What the fuck Cin?!" Mercury demanded.

Cinder very nearly struck Mercury too, but caught herself. Looking down at the bloody mess that resembled Holly's face, Cinder clenched her fists, a twinge of pain ringing through her arm. The adrenaline coursing through her veins masked its entirety, but she could guess something had broken. She shook it out, taking a few calming breaths, then without a word she tossed some lien on the bar and walked out.

Chapter End Notes

End Season 3

It was another, thankfully shorter ride, as we decided to make this fluffier. Season 4 will come back with a return to form those who joined us in On Thin Ice will enjoy. Until then, thankyou for reading, we are hard at work continuing Thicker Than Water, if you haven't read it, give it a try, I'd really appreciate your thoughts and subscriptions, it's my baby.

End Notes

I apologize for the wait, we post primarily on FanFiction and I take responsibility for the lag.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!